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**‘Carving out Niches’: Informality, Work
& Migration in a Muslim Craft
Community of North India**

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**Submitted for Doctor of Philosophy in Social
Anthropology**

University of Sussex

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For my parents

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
ANTHROPOLOGY

'CARVING OUT NICHES': INFORMALITY, WORK & MIGRATION IN A MUSLIM
CRAFT COMMUNITY OF NORTH INDIA

SUMMARY

Based on 18 months of fieldwork this thesis focuses on work, life and migration in a Muslim wood crafting community of Saharanpur (North India). Drawing on ethnographic and other material regarding Indian Muslims, artisans, informal economies and 'informality' more broadly, the thesis addresses four primary questions: What does it mean to work in an economic space where moves towards labour informality, as played out in post-liberalisation economies globally, have always been the primary means of organisation? Are workers in such spaces better equipped to deal with informality? Where state regulation has always been partial, what regulates everyday economic activity? Are these spaces isolated, in decline and increasingly marginalised, or are they highly connected and central to contemporary capitalism? In this context the thesis follows the lives and stories of craft workers across a variety of 'niches of production' which are defined through religious, gender-based and affective factors.

The thesis utilises 'informality', not just to understand work and conditions of employment, but also networks, connections, niches and spaces of production and exchange. It begins with the history of a community and industry that has been shaped by the colonial experience, the upheavals of partition, political changes and economic liberalisation. The thesis explores the complexities of a supply chain filled with ambiguous actors and the connections and networks within which craft workers operate. It traces the influence of Islam and explores connections of religion and friendship. It follows pathways of migration across the country and to the Gulf.

Whilst playing out within a gendered and stratified social fabric within which production is embedded, the long experience of operating under conditions of informality has given workers in Saharanpur certain attributes useful in negotiating the economic terrain. However, it also makes them accepting of these conditions. Connections, built on Muslim and other networks, enables workers to retain a high degree of geographical mobility. Whilst there are very specific constraints emanating from their Muslim identity, these networks create certain possibilities for connecting with other people and places. Carefully cultivated links of community, neighbourhood and friendship provide an important resource through which work can be found and mutual support provided. Yet there is a duality present throughout, with these same networks simultaneously acting as a means of incorporation into chains of supply.

Against this complex backdrop the thesis explores the ways in which workers engage with networks, connections, niches and spaces of production and exchange. It considers the constraints and potentialities therein. It makes its original contribution to knowledge on two counts. Firstly, and primarily, it provides an empirical contribution by providing a thickly descriptive account of lives in an industry which has received little ethnographic attention. Secondly, it utilises circulatory understandings of the production of capitalism to show how spaces such as Saharanpur's wood industry are not marginal but form an important part of the way capitalism works and how such spaces have played a role in shaping global processes of labour force informalisation.

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Prologue

Setting the Scene



Raw wood departing a wholesaler and arriving in Kamil Wali Gully

It was late afternoon of November 2010 when I first visited Kamil Wali Gully, in the small industrial city of Saharanpur, located in north-western India. Following one of the heavily laden buffalo carts which had originated from the wood wholesale markets on the outskirts of the city, I turned into the entrance of the narrow, roughly metalled lane. Hitting a pot hole the cart lurched heavily, its precarious load looking briefly as if it may spill, but then recovered its centre and continued on. The gully was, like so many in the city, filled with constant tapping from the chisels and hammers of carvers and carpenters. This was layered against the drone of cutting and buffing machines which filled the air with noise and sawdust. The woodworking *mohallas* were located in the Muslim areas of the city and the vast majority of the labour force was drawn from this community. As such the gullies were occasionally interspersed with *masjids* from which the call to prayer provided the only cessation to the otherwise continuous soundscape of production.

The shop fronts of workplaces opened onto the street and a glance in revealed the various stages of production in which each specialised. Movement between the shops was constant as workers and artisans joined others to socialise or grease the wheels of business. *Chai* (tea) boys ran up and down the gullies taking orders from craftsmen back to their father's stalls, before returning with the sweet milky fuel which kept production ticking over. Between the workshops rickshaw *wallahs* (drivers)¹ hauled products in various states as each item made its journey to completion through numerous hands. These spaces were highly public but the rickshaw *wallahs* also knocked on the entrances to more concealed realms: The large steel gates of mass producing factories and the small wood fronted doors or curtained entrances of homes. Homeworkers were often women who, albeit in a less visible manner, provided a significant portion of the labour force passing work and arranging the means of completing orders through gendered informal networks that contained further connections in the supply chain.

Much more visible outward connections also interspersed the scene: Lorries of various sizes squeezed their way through the narrow lanes, kicking up clouds of dust as they trundled towards markets both near and far, carrying goods on the first leg of a journey that might finish in Mumbai or Delhi, Europe or the Gulf, America or Japan. Workers, too, were on the move as they frequently changed their work locations, utilising networks of friends, neighbours, relatives and others to negotiate their conditions of employment. Likewise, these connections fed into outward migrations. Craft workers came and went heading to every corner of the country, from Kashmir to Kerala and from Nagaland to Mumbai. Others travelled further afield to the labour camps of the Arabian Gulf, bringing back stories of success and newfound wealth or failure and great loss. The largely informal labour arrangements of this old craft industry did not, then, imbue an image of peripheral decline, slowly being usurped by globalisation and contemporary forms of capitalism. Instead the gully sat at the centre of a variety of complex connections. Its niches of labour and production reflected the realities of working life and labour informality that are persistent, even increasing, in numerous global localities.

¹ Wallah can refer to a person or object (i.e. taxi wallah or 'that small wallah').

Within this highly connected space many individuals plied their trade in a variety of arrangements. As it cleared the entrance of the gully the teetering buffalo cart revealed a small workshop with the proprietor's name and phone number roughly painted on an exterior wall. Mohammad Arshad, a ruddy-cheeked and slightly portly man of around 30 years of age, cheerily beckoned me to approach. Married with three young children, Arshad lived in a house situated in a narrow gully some ten minutes cycle from his workshop. The house was shared with his parents, two brothers, their wives and children. It was his small workshop that would eventually provide a base for the majority of fieldwork. Arshad, although I did not know this at the time, would soon become a friend, confidant and teacher. A few doors down a larger cutting shop was about to receive its delivery of raw wood. Once fashioned these slices of lumber would be passed to carving shops to be transformed into bedheads and sofa backs. One such shop belonged to Mustaqim Ansari who flashed me a white-toothed smile whenever I caught his eye. Alongside Mustaqim sat four of his sons: The eldest, Javid, was seventeen with the other boys ranging from thirteen to seven. Occasionally they were joined by the youngest, four year old Ismail, who copied his siblings by tapping on spare pieces of wood. Mustaqim and the boys, along with one teenage and one young daughter, lived in two small rooms that they rented in a gully around the corner from their workshop. Deliveries would arrive in the same way at the shop next door. This petty manufactory was owned by Shanawas who employed a few staff on a piece-rate basis. His most experienced wood carver, Mohammad Sajid, had married two years previously, although was without children, and lived with his extended family in a nearby village. Later he would become my guide through networks of migration across the country. As I watched him work, day after day, I was struck by the ways in which the connections and niches that constituted economic life in the city echoed the relationship between carver, tools and material.

Wood carving is a tricky skill. To acquire it you must start at a young age. First you must learn to sit, to connect with the material. Hands use the tools but feet too are deployed to brace and steady the wood. The feet are bare, out of respect for the art that is being created, and, as a result, greater dexterity in gripping and shifting the work is achieved. Slowly, through these connections, the apprentice starts to understand the nature of

the material: its feel, its texture, its problems, and its grain. As the chisel moves along the line of the grain, the wood gives easily, yielding to each impact brought upon it, allowing itself to be shaped according to the desire of the mind which guides the hand. The designs are abstract, following Islamic practice. Yet the shapes required do not always move with the grain of the wood. As a floral outline or pattern turns to take its curves across the grain, the wood begins to resist. It no longer easily gives way into smooth, satisfying surfaces. Instead it becomes a constraint. It is this sense of being active in shaping the economic and physical terrain but also being constrained, directed or redirected by a variety of structural, regulatory and communal factors along with the broader scape of late capitalism (Tsing, 2000) that forms the basis of my analysis. Yet there is also an implicit informality to the act of carving which hints at the presence of more subtle considerations. Every piece is planned and designed, yet no two pieces are the same. The informality of the relationship between carvers, materials and tools belies the formally laid plans of the designer. The curves, lines and niches that appear are just as often the result of messy interactions imbued with a variety of passions, emotions and connections as they are the consequences of an intended, rational or pre-planned template. This 'messiness' adds an additional facet to sculpting processes but also provides an important means through which complex networks of production, and the individuals therein, are incorporated into global chains of supply, labour recruitment and the movement or migration of people.



A detailed carving for a chair back and Mohammad Sajid at work in Hyderabad

Chapter One

Introduction: Informality, Connections & Muslim Craft Workers



Kites form a tangled web above the rooftops

What does it mean to work in an economic space where moves towards labour informality, as played out in post-liberalisation economies globally, have always been the primary means of organisation? Are workers in such spaces better equipped to deal with labour informality? Where state or corporate regulation has always been partial at best, what regulates everyday economic activity? Are these spaces isolated, in decline and increasingly marginalised, or are they highly connected and central to contemporary capitalism? The stage for this thesis is a particular place, the city of Saharanpur and its woodworking industry. It focuses on work, life and migration among individuals who carve out livelihoods in the woodworking cluster. Broadly conceiving of working lives as playing out within an ‘informal economy’, the thesis asks what happens inside this space and how it connects globally. The individuals whose stories provide the focus are craft workers, are Muslim, and are Indian. They work within largely unregulated environments, produce for domestic and international supply chains² and forge migrational connections within India³ and beyond⁴. They are feeling, emotive, passionate and guided by varied dreams, aspirations, fears and anxieties.

² See chapter 3.

³ See chapter 8.

⁴ See chapter 9.

In Saharanpur, economic liberalisation⁵ and incorporation into multinational supply chains has led to reconfigurations of older arrangements, such as *ustad-shagird* (master-apprentice)⁶ systems and the bazaar-based economy. Older craft structures have allowed global supply chains to become embedded in broader livelihoods within public and private realms, aided by local configurations of power constituted within blurred class relations and highly gendered working arrangements. However, embeddedness alone does not sufficiently conceptualise complexity and interconnectedness. Whilst remaining critical of labour conditions, this thesis argues that Saharanpur's craft workers are adept at navigating the economic terrain and build on a variety of connections to 'carve out niches' within India and beyond.

I utilise informality to understand networks, connections, niches and spaces of production and exchange rather than just conditions of employment. Connections are historically constructed and result from a 'culture of migration' amongst woodworkers. They interact with a variety of new and older networks which become accessible due to workers' Muslim identity. The circulatory nature of these networks bring other influences to bear. This creates a complex milieu where ideas, perspectives and moralities of returning migrants⁷, reformist Islam and visiting *Tabligh Jamaats* (religious tours)⁸ interact with economic factors to make and remake spaces of work. In addition, the intense sociality required to maintain connections of work and migration means that attention must also be paid to their emotive nature. Connections are not only underpinned by religious identity or economic need but also by intimacy, affection and friendship⁹. I actively seek out an analytical space that crosses bounds between often disparate literature and approaches. In utilising 'informality', for example, I engage with the economic, spatial and interpersonal. This 'scaling' of informality, I suggest, allows us to think about individual and communal desires as well as global economic forces and capitalist (re)structuring. It engages with exploitation and incorporation but also possibilities and negotiations. It paints workers, artisans, middlemen/women, petty

⁵ In 1991 the Indian Finance Minister (now Prime Minister) Manmohan Singh, under pressure from the IMF, launched a budget which opened up the economy and liberalised its institutions.

⁶ See chapter 5.

⁷ See chapters 8 & 9.

⁸ See chapter 6.

⁹ See, in particular, chapter 7.

capitalists and factory owners not merely as actors with varying degrees of agency but as ‘actants’¹⁰ whose engagements are more than mere performances within broader economic and geographical space (Amin & Thrift, 2007).

In spite of this broad frame, the thesis is very much an ethnographic account. It provides a detailed and thickly descriptive engagement with individuals, with a particular community and a certain (although not always homogenous) identity. Indeed, Saharanpur’s Muslim craft community is particularly relevant to considering informality, both in terms of labour and more broadly. A disproportionate number of North Indian Muslims work in ‘informal sector’ environments (Harriss-White, 2003; Sachar, 2006)¹¹, are particularly concentrated in urban areas¹² and often occupy partially ghettoised and informal spaces (Jasani, 2007; Hasan, 2008; Gayer & Jeffrelot, 2013; Sachar, 2006). Although this demography is well documented little work focuses on Indian Muslims (Jeffery & Jeffery, 2012). Artisans, in contrast, “are often seen in terms of their trading connections, implying that [they] have more agency [than factory workers although...] are not necessarily better off financially” (Gille & O’Riain, 2002; p. 282).

Craft arrangements allow economic activity to become blurred into more intimate forms of sociality such as friendship and family. The focus throughout this thesis is on individuals and their daily lives. In taking this approach I follow recent calls for South Asian anthropology to shift away from ‘collectivity’ and the assumption “that identities founded on caste and religion dominated to such a degree that individual agency and a sense of selfhood were marginal” (Arnold & Blackburn, 2004; p.2). Instead, I emphasise the value of life stories and individual experiences¹³ in understanding economic action and connections within the city and beyond. This, however, leads us not to a simplistic rendition of agency but to the complexity of acting within niches and networks.

¹⁰ Amin & Thrift borrow the term from narrative theory to indicate something more than a ‘character’ in that ‘actants’ are fundamental to the narrative structure as opposed to being mere performers within it.

¹¹ 8% of Muslims work in the formal sector compared to 21% of the total population (Sachar, 2006).

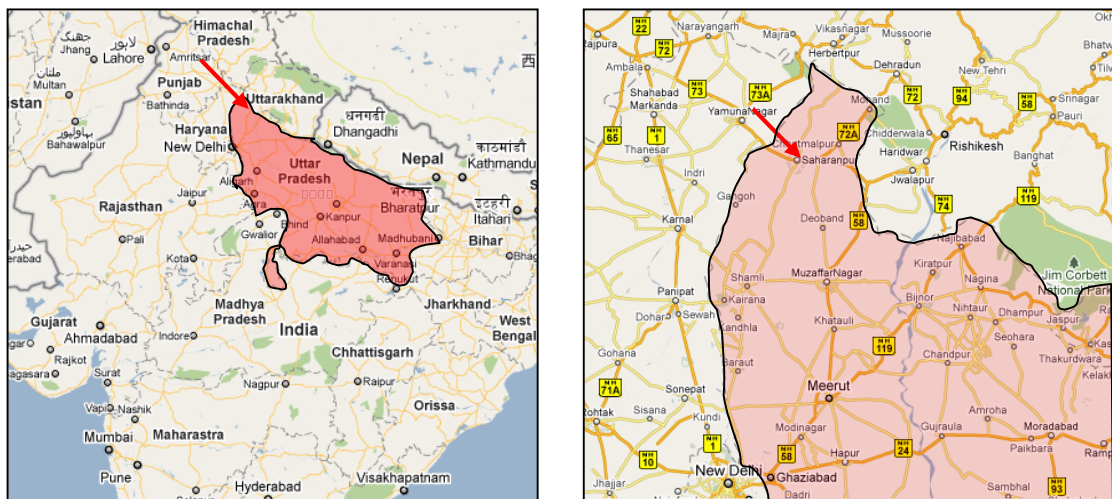
¹² 35.7% Muslims living in urban areas compared to 27.8% of the total population (Sachar, 2006).

¹³ This is not to downplay shared or collective identities. Indeed, there are valid criticisms that deploying narrative techniques, such as life stories, can create “...a false sense of closure to highly complex, underdetermined diachronic processes. [With this based on] the familiar default position of liberal modernism: the tendency to look for social and cultural causes largely in individual action, and for social action largely in individual causes” Comaroff & Comaroff, (2001; p.109). Whilst I remain conscious of the risk of adhering to a ‘liberal modernism’, the focus on individuals’ stories reveals that this does not have to be the outcome.

Saharanpur & Uttar Pradesh

Founded in dedication to the Sufi saint Shah Haran Christi in the 1300s (Pal, 1999) and located in the north-western corner of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), Saharanpur is a city of 703,345 people (Census, 2011)¹⁴ with the broader district being around 3,464,228 (MSME, 2011). Situated between the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, Saharanpur District borders Haryana to the west and the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand to the north. Saharanpur's wood industry is huge with government estimates placing the number employed as being around 50,000 (MSME, 2011). However, with this only covering 'artisans', others place total employment much higher at close to 250,000 (Cunningham et al, 2005). The industry itself consists of around 2160 production sites of various sizes (MSME, 2011), with the vast majority of the labour force drawn from the Muslim community. In U.P. the Muslim population forms a minority of around 17%, although this tends to be higher in the north and west; in Saharanpur district the Muslim population is about 39% (Tyagi, 2008)¹⁵¹⁶. As India's largest centre for wood production, Saharanpur produces around RS400 crore¹⁷ of products per year of which about half is for export (MSME, 2011). The industry's production environments range from large-scale factories to small workshops, individual craft workers and homeworkers. Although some larger factories are government registered it is informality that dominates.

Figure 1.1: Location of Uttar Pradesh and Saharanpur



Source: Adapted from Google Maps

¹⁴ Provisional figures.

¹⁵ From 2001 census figures.

¹⁶ Tyagi also notes a high illiteracy rate of 39% compared to 29% for Hindus in the district.

¹⁷ Around \$65 million.

Although Muslims in U.P. have suffered substantial ostracism and violence, political parties vigorously court the Muslim population. Whilst heavily marginalised, powerful Muslim elites, predominately formed of wealthy artisans, landowners, exporters and traders who “...command wealth, political power and patronage [...] are involved in state and national politics, and tied to the all-India regional and local parties” (Hasan, 2007; p.23). Traditionally a heartland for the Congress Party, Uttar Pradesh experienced a rise in nationalist politics throughout the 1980s, with traditional caste-based electioneering giving way to coalitions among the Hindu population centred on national identity and anti-Muslim rhetoric. This culminated in the 1992 *Babri Masjid* demolition¹⁸ (Froystad, 2005) followed by bouts of communal violence primarily targeted at the state’s Muslims which led to increased communal division. Although this would lead to the successful installation of a BJP administration in 1991, the multi-caste vote base was not to last. The cross-caste coalition proved unsustainable as attempts to pander to both upper and backward castes (BCs) backfired. The BJP, with high castes defecting to Congress and BCs to the BSP, lost control in 2002 to the BSP, whose charismatic leader, Mayawati, gained an overall majority in 2007. This lasted throughout the period of fieldwork. However, August 2014 saw the re-election of the BJP both in U.P. and nationally.

Definitions & Dichotomies: Defining Informality in Saharanpur

Work in Saharanpur takes place on the fringes of state regulation, a feature shared with the majority of India’s labour force¹⁹. This is amplified by the lack of state involvement in Muslim communities (Gayer & Jeffrelot, 2013). Since Hart (1973) first applied the word ‘informal’ to certain areas of economic activity, it has been debated within various disciplines (Rakowski, 1994). The formal/informal dichotomy now plays out within varying realms and levels. It is discussed in terms of economic sectors (Hart, 1973; Chen, 2007; Guha-Khasnobis et al, 2006; Breman, 1999; Phillips, 2011), urban spaces (Bayat, 2000; Hansen & Vaa, 2004; Roy, 2009) and as a way of conceiving how affective and

¹⁸ It was claimed by the BJP and right wing movements, such as the RSS, that the Badri Masjid was built on the site of a Hindu temple. The riots that saw its demolition were seen by many Muslims as a tremendous loss and a major threat to the security of the community.

¹⁹ Currently estimates of informal employment range as high as 92% (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, 2007) with this sector generating around 62% of the country’s GDP (Baruah, 2004).

emotive forces underpin economic and political activity (Fernandez, 2000; Misztal, 2002; Granovetter, 1985). In terms of work, informality can be seen as a preference (Maloney, 2004), a constrained dynamism which, once freed from regulation, can jump-start economic development (De Soto, 1989; 2003; Shah & Mandava, 2005; Tipple, 2004) or as a force producing unprotected and exploited labour structures (Birbeck, 1978; Upadhyaya, 2003; Harriss-White & Sinha, 2007; Portes et al, 1989). It can be seen either as a means of fragmenting global working classes, or as the crucible of entrepreneurial spirit (Fernandez-Kelly, 2006; Tinker, 1997; Rakowski, 1994). Informal urban spaces can likewise be seen as a forced condition of marginal and lumpen existence (Davis, 2006), spaces of direct or indirect subaltern action (Sutcliffe, 2012; Lindell, 2010; Cross, 1997; Bayat, 2000)²⁰, alternative forms of economic organisation (North, 2005) or even radical resistance (Gregory, 2007). Informality can be seen as marginal to modernity and contemporary capitalism (Geertz, 1978; Carrier, 1992) or as the fundamental form through which it now operates (Roy, 2009; 2005). Here I concur with Roy (2009) in arguing that “informality is not a pre-capitalist relic or an icon of ‘backward’ economies. Rather, it is a capitalist mode of production, par excellence” (p.826).

On a basic level, however, informality must be defined in the context of formality. If formality is planned or deliberately designed, then informality consists of that which emerges without design. This may occur in the context of more formal structures, programs, decisions and economics, or in their absence. Whilst the blurring of notions of an ‘informal economy’ with, on the one hand, illegal activity and, on the other, state orchestrated or sanctioned action has led to some suggesting it should be abandoned (i.e. Roitman, 2005), I continue to find it a useful way of conceiving certain forms of work, niches and connections. Certainly informality is not distinctive to the informal sector, it drives processes throughout the economy and is utilised by middle classes and elites as well as subalterns and the urban poor (Roy, 2009). In this sense, informality represents a ‘grey space’ (Yiftachel, 2009 cited in Roy, 2011) or a ‘vanishing point’ that can never truly be obtained in its pure form (Roy, 2011). However, this does not mean

²⁰ Cross (1997), for example, details how street vendors in Mexico utilise “effective adaptations to their structural political circumstances in meeting vendors’ individual and collective needs to gain access to space and to be protected from the arbitrary policy dictates of government officials who rarely, if ever, design to take their interests into account” (p.57).

it should be dismissed. Indeed, the blurring and intertwining of the formal and informal is not so much a sign of the irrelevance of the latter as it is an indication of informality's increasing pervasiveness within economic structures (Meagher, 2010).

For the purposes of this thesis I suggest that informality forms a continuum definable by the degree to which official 'governance mechanisms' reach into economic and other activity (Guha-Khasnobis et al, 2006). This avoids long since fragmented dichotomies, whilst continuing to acknowledge the relevance of 'informal' or 'unorganised' realms of work and life. It also applies to spatial activity, such as workers' relationships with urban and production environments or migratory circuits. Economic and spatial informality are, after all, intimately related (Kudva, 2005; 2009). Informality is not necessarily a chaotic or negative force. Informally constituted structures have their own series of strengths and weaknesses, of positive and negative effects, of exploitative relations and mutuality (Guha-Khasnobis et al, 2006, Tsing, 2012). In the Indian context scholars have long been aware of the importance of considering the ways in which both formal and informal realms of work and life are structured through intersections with, among other factors, caste, gender, space, ethnicity, language and religion (Harriss-White, 2003).

Here care must be taken not to treat informal economies as the same everywhere, even within the Indian geographical context. Each niche of production and exchange has its own history, structure and networks. The focus is on description and the "need to explore the actual practices embedded in informal institutions as well as the linkages between the informal and formal realm, rather than resorting to culturalist stereotypes and rational choice reconstructions of values and motives" (Meagher, 2007; p.407). However, this does not imply neutrality. Both structural and actual violence experienced by Indian Muslims is all too real. In the broader economic context the push towards an increasingly informalised labour force is very much a political project (Harvey, 2003). Across the following introductory chapter I begin with this larger picture. In later sections I shift the focus increasingly towards 'the local', firstly attending to the role of Islam in economic processes, then the economic and social situation of Indian Muslims, before finally turning to a consideration of more emotive and affective aspects of economic practice and to the bodies of workers themselves.

Locating Saharanpur's Muslim Craft Workers within Economic Informality

In dusty gullies and factory yards of Saharanpur the constitution of craft work is changing. Global pressures are very much a part of economic life. This can be felt right through the supply chain with the drive for decreasing prices creating layers of competition and fragmentation (Bolt, 2011; Brenner, 1997) as new niches of extraction emerge. These niches are determined by, among other factors, skill, status or gender, niches which form in factories, workshops, street corners or homes. As with much of the global labour force, craft workers in the city are highly mobile, building on an array of old and new connections across India and, increasingly, to the Gulf. Both formal and informal aspects are involved in shaping these processes. However, it is with the latter that I begin.

Informal production environments, such as Saharanpur, have “been the hallmark of economic activity for many centuries, with the modern transition to capitalist markets organised around legally enforced private property rights being historically recent and exceptional” (Phillips, 2011; p.381). In much of India’s so-called formal sector, too, it is informality that dominates. As Cross (2010) suggests, regarding free trade zones in Andhra Pradesh, “[these zones] are better theorised as unexceptional spaces that make legible, legitimate and visible the conditions of informality and precariousness under which most economic activity already takes place in South Asia” (p.30). Even in the so-called ‘organised sector’ much employment is based not on formal arrangements but on what Gooptu (2013b) refers to as ‘organised informality’ where work becomes just as precarious as the supposedly ‘informal’ sector. Informality, then, comprises structural continuity with the ‘formal’, rather than existing in the context of differentiation. It is a complex assemblage of historically and socially embedded processes rather than something superfluous or secondary (Meagher, 1995; Leonard, 2000). Within the Indian context it is informality that has always been the “overwhelming and enduring reality of [...] urban economies” (Gooptu, 2001; p.2).

Ethnographies focusing on ‘formal sector’ employment have provided insights into how labour is recruited and controlled in the context of post-liberalisation economic restructuring (Rudnyckyj, 2010; Mollona, 2005; Shever, 2008). Some industries have

seen an increasing degree of informality within the factory, others have seen a more complete informalisation of labour with workers pushed into subcontracting units. Mollona (2005), for example, describes how the fragmentation of Sheffield's steel industry led to increased pervasiveness of contractors, who in turn were able to subcontract 'off the books' work to individuals and petty producers. Shever (2008) describes how, following privatisation of a state sector oil company in Argentina, workers were laid off and also encouraged to reapply as contractors. These contracting units often formed around kinship networks with senior male family members at the head, who in turn employed staff cum kin. Kin-based obligations became the means through which the labour force was recruited, maintained and controlled.

Although these examples have meant the end of direct negotiation between labour and capital, such systems allow larger producers to retain links to a much more flexible pool of labour. This transformation also demands increasing precariousness with regard to labour, as workers take on a greater burden of risk within global economic fluctuations (Molé, 2010). For these workers the economic conditions of informality are new and have been a direct consequence of economic restructuring. In India, too, following liberalisation or what Breman (2001) refers to as 'informalisation policy', various labouring groups have seen formal labour arrangements disappear resulting in a slide down the 'labour hierarchy' (Parry, 1999; Breman, 2004)²¹. For Saharanpur's craft workers, however, this plays out differently. Informality is neither new nor can it be seen as increasing to the degree found elsewhere. The long experience of working in conditions of informality means workers are both accepting of such arrangements and adept at negotiating within them. As Breman (2001) argues:

“[Whereas] superfluous labour expelled from their jobs in the formal sector tend to lack the resilience and survival skills that constitute the social capital of those more accustomed to life at the foot of the economy. Those who have had to work and live in that situation all their lives are socialised in these aptitudes right from their early engagement in the labour process”.

(p. 4807)

²¹ India has experienced an increase in informal activity since the economic liberalisation of the 1980s and, in particular since the liberalising 1991 budget (Chaudhuri & Banerjee, 2007). However, informality has always been the primary form of economic arrangement. Even during the Nehruvian era of centralised planning and state orchestrated industrial development it was 'informal' work that provided most livelihoods.

Craft workers fall into the latter, yet occupy a complex position. They can be seen as labouring on the fringes or outside of global capitalism (Gmelch, 1986). Alternatively, they can be seen as having been captured (White, 2004) or incorporated (Kantor, 2009) within supply chains. Teleological approaches tend to see craftwork, and the bazaar economies in which they are embedded, as gradually being usurped by the industrial arrangements of modernity (i.e. Geertz, 1978). Whilst this may have been the pattern in Europe (Carrier, 1992) it is not so in the Indian context (Bremar, 1999; Ciotti, 2007) or in other regions (Sainz, 1998; Elyachar, 2002). Indeed, there is a re-emergence of artisanal forms of organisation in the US and Europe (Ponder, 2010), with some lauding reconfigured craft-based systems of 'putting out' as compatible with production efficiency and generative of improved standards of living (i.e. Lazerson, 1995).

More critical voices, however, point out that craft working arrangements largely ascribe to the ideals of liberalisation where "the integration of economic, social, and cultural practice — the embeddedness of economy in society — that modernization and capitalism were supposed to have severed is seen as a positive attribute to be emulated" (Elyachar, 2002; p.500). This is not historically new. Craftwork has long coexisted with other forms of production. In this sense informality can be seen either "as part and parcel of 'late capitalism' [...or as stemming] from historically evolved indigenous forms of economic organisation, with their own forms of control over labour surplus" (Lindell, 2010; p.210). Although painted as being 'pre-modern' craftwork was regularly "required to sustain industrialised production. Artisans often filled niches left open by large-scale industry or undertook aspects of production processes unsuitable for factory production" (Beinin, 2001; p.14). Whilst Marx (1938/1887) saw artisans as petty bourgeoisie, defined by the ownership of a workshop and tools, Kumar (1988) describes craft workers in Banaras (India) as being "uniformally classifiable as 'lower class'" (p.12). Amongst craft and other informal workers, arrangements that give the appearance of 'self-employment' often conceal forms of wage labour (Bremar, 1996).

Within diverse and socially interlocked supply chains, with their "interwoven institutions of family, workshop, and community" (Elyachar, 2002; p.500), categories of class become problematic. As Lindell (2010) suggests: "Given the complex and multiple

subjectivities of informal actors, [...] one may ask what kinds of collective identities are possible or whether unity of purpose can be achieved” (p.14). This is a point made in a succinct manner regarding the ‘unorganised’ sector as a whole by Harriss-White and Gooptu (2009) when they suggest “if class struggle is first a struggle over class and second a struggle between classes, we can say that the overwhelming majority of the Indian work-force is still kept engaged in the first struggle while capital, even though stratified and fractured, is engaged in the second” (p.89). In other words, India’s informal workers often comprise an atomised rather than a conscious, mobilised and effective class (Marx, 1938/1887).

This creates multiple solidarities as capitalism acts to modify categories of household, gender and caste in ways which stymie the emergence of class consciousness, leading to articulations of informal work as ‘unorganised’ both in terms of union and corporate structuring (Harriss-White, 2003). ‘Unorganised’, however, should not be taken to mean ‘unregulated’ but rather that structuring occurs through factors including gender, religion, caste and space (ibid)²². This is not to dismiss class. Neighbourhoods, such as Saharanpur’s tightly packed *mohallas*, have been shown to be important realms for class construction (Chandavarkar, 1994), a fact that hints at a duality in discussions of informality. Whilst libertarians, such as De Soto (1989)²³, far overstate the empowering capacity of informality, the long experience of working in informal conditions has given craftspeople in the city ‘aptitudes’ (Bremner, 2001) which enable them, not only to negotiate work and conditions, but also shape economic space. However, the ‘spatial’ dimensions of home, workshop, neighbourhood, city, state and ‘the global’ play out in complex ways which themselves add further layers of constraint and possibility.

²² Literature on the ‘formal’ sector is also engaged in debates regarding such divisions. Explanations have been sought in the persistence of ‘primordial affiliations’ of kin and caste (Chakrabarty, 1988). Fernandez (1997), however, argues that “social categories are not natural, trans-historical entities but are created and marked by the production of political, symbolic and post-colonial boundaries” (p.4). For Fernandez the persistence of non-class associations is less about primordial loyalties than it is about the resources and solidarities that such affiliations offer workers, unions and others. Likewise, Chandavarkar (1994) suggests that the variety of alternative affinities were maintained out of necessity in response to insecurity and provided a fall back in times of low labour demand. In spite of this, workers did come together in effective labour movements often constructed beyond the workplace in neighbourhoods and communities (ibid). However, Bagchi (2002) argues that the lingering effect of colonial labour which ensured a supply of cheap, displaced labour that encouraged indenturing and the use of intermediaries also plays a part. These debates are important in illustrating that the types of arrangements being discussed here are not exclusive to the ‘informal’ sector but are very much a part of the Indian economy as a whole.

²³ De Soto (1989) sees the informal economy as tethered by too much formality which holds back entrepreneurial drive. The prescription, De Soto suggests, should be to legitimise informal activity in order to stimulate development.

Informality, Space & Craftwork in Saharanpur

Informal niches of craft production, such as Saharanpur's *mohallas*, are not only bounded by economic assemblies but also by the spatial environment. Donner & De Neve (2006), for example, cite a variety of historical and contemporary work (i.e. Gooptu, 2001; Chandavarkar, 1994) to illustrate the role neighbourhoods play as sites of contestation and negotiation around formations of culture, labour, identity and state control. Urban space and neighbourhoods are as much a part of the organisation of production as is the factory floor in industrial settings. When we are dealing with 'informal economies' everyday activities such as caring for children, fetching water or socialising are not segregated from production (Kudva, 2009/2005). In the wood *mohallas*, work, networks of labour, public space, the domestic realm and production are deeply intertwined. The neighbourhoods are "...physically bound in the larger context of the city and the region; but more crucially, they serve to further circumscribe work and the movement of workers in the informal economy" (Kudva, 2009; p.168).

Informality, then, not only consists "of the activities of the poor, or a particular status of labor, or marginality [...but also acts as] an organising logic which emerges under the paradigm of liberalization" (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004; p.26). In this sense, space does not simply produce social processes but is itself defined and sustained by markets and the capitalist economy (ibid). Understanding Saharanpur, its neighbourhoods and its wood industry must take account of the spatial as being in constant interplay with the conditions of liberalisation. Spatial informality, although negotiated, contributes to "structures that govern through patronage, division and economic oppression" (ibid; p.27). However, Herod (1997) reminds us that workers are not passive but are "sentient social beings who both intentionally and unintentionally produce economic geographies through their actions – all the while recognising that they are constrained [...] in these actions" (p.3). In other words, space itself represents a contested and negotiated realm (Harvey, 1982).

For individuals in informal industries and neighbourhoods the negotiation of space is one of incremental change, or what Bayat (2000) refers to as 'quiet encroachment' via "relationships of reciprocity, trust and negotiation rather than [...] modern notions of

individual self-interest, fixed rules and contracts” (p.549)²⁴. Much discussion has emerged regarding the potential of such networks. Singerman (1995), for example, details how the *Sha’b*²⁵ in Egypt utilise informal networks to exercise influence in political processes. These ‘avenues of participation’, Singerman suggests, are based on connections of kin or neighbourhood. They are flexible and efficient and also used as a means through which marriages are arranged, public goods obtained, work found and disputes settled. Elyachar (2010), also in Egypt, takes this further by suggesting that these communicative channels form an informal infrastructure²⁶ which “normally remain[s] in the background of perception but through which the collective identity of the poor masses is both expressed and reproduced” (p.457). However, the negotiation of space and labour through informality is not exclusive to low level workers, those residing in marginal spaces or the ‘poor masses’. Jeffery (2009) (cited in Roy, 2011) describes the supposedly subaltern informal practice of *jugaar* (make do/improvise)²⁷ being utilised by Indian rural middle class men to negotiate sparse employment opportunities. Likewise, Roy (2007) draws attention to the ways in which middleclass or elite groups and developers also utilise informal methods to occupy land and property further blurring the limits of informality.

In Saharanpur the wood *mohallas* themselves are not only informally constituted, to a degree²⁸, but are active in reproducing the labour force. Tightly packed neighbourhoods and workshops create an intense sociality that ferments close relationships between workers, contractors and petty manufacturers²⁹. In turn, communal structuring creates limits on available spaces. This interplays with migration, affecting the localities workers can access, and also with local dynamics, creating a city of two halves and of two

²⁴ For Bayat, resistance only occurs when these encroachments are challenged by the state.

²⁵ Subaltern or urban poor.

²⁶ Simone (2004) makes a similar point in the African context, suggesting the notion of ‘people as infrastructure’ where “economic collaboration among residents seemingly marginalized from and immiserated by urban life [...forms an] economy of perception and collaborative practice [...] constituted through the capacity of individual actors to circulate across and become familiar with a broad range of spatial, residential, economic, and transactional positions” (p.408).

²⁷ Meaning to ‘make do’ or to improvise. Hence a *jugaar* car may be made of many vehicles or a *jugaar* woman may refer to a lady of perceived moral imperfection such as a prostitute. The term is commonly used in Saharanpur.

²⁸ In Saharanpur we are not dealing with slums that feature in a lot of work on urban informality. The majority of property, both residential and workshop, is built on plots purchased from landowners. In this sense their ownership is formal. However, the actual construction of property (large and small) is done without formal planning and as such is of high density.

²⁹ See, in particular, chapter 7.

economies³⁰. Other constraints on the forms, types and spaces of work are also present. These include the gendered nature of working environments and the negotiation of *purdah* within and between homes and factories³¹. Gendered production networks link women of various positions and status within local *mohallas* to global supply chains. These networks contain their own layers and ambiguities with women acting as both workers and intermediaries in the process. Just as they may form ‘avenues of participation’, these same networks also provide the means of incorporation into global chains of supply (Wood, 2003). Economic relations, then, are not limited to the bazaar and factory. They transcend work and social life, workshop and home, public and private (Kazi, 1999, White, 2004; Kabeer, 2000). The thread of informal production endures into the domestic and personal realm. This applies to both genders. However, female wood workers in particular negotiate work within the context of duties to family and domestic life. As White (2004) argues, the engagement with modernity in this case:

“Does not assume a sharp distinction between domestic and public spheres and between family and economy, but rather enables the connection of “domestic” values and practices to community, market and state. [...This encourages] fragmentation as women’s labour is captured for the market within small, often informal, workshops”.

(p.145 & 148)

The identity-based and clustered nature of the industry, a feature of much of India’s informal sector (Das, 2005), creates certain spatial dynamics. As Werbner (1990) argues, successful industries, in order to expand, must allow a defusing of their ethnic specificity. However, protecting knowledge and economic niches leads to “social encapsulation, alienation and ethnic cultural-cum-religious enclavement” (p.37). In Saharanpur, fragmentation, competition and enclavement creates a workforce that is almost entirely Muslim (particularly in the craft trades). However, those skills in demand fluctuate as a result of inflows of additional labour, economic change and re-structuring of local supply chains. As a consequence of this, and other historical factors³², among the Muslim

³⁰ The city is split by a railway line to the north of which are the wood *mohallas* and most of the city’s Muslim community. The south comprises almost entirely of Hindu neighbourhoods and is noticeably better off. Both, however, contain a high degree of informal activity and have numerous intersections with each other.

³¹ See chapter 4.

³² See chapter 2.

workforce there is much mixing of *biraderi* and social status (although it remains highly gendered). However, the informality of such systems is also embedded in a variety of obligations which are usurped and shaped by the supply chain to “satisfy its needs for cheap labour and expanding markets” (White, 2004; p.146). This acts to blur the limits of ‘work’. Elyachar (2010), for example, argues that apparently nonchalant activity in poor neighbourhoods of Cairo, such as social visits, can be seen as an investment in *wasta*³³. This itself represents a form of informal labour as it allows access to resources, mutual support and networks of work and recruitment. This labour is not for immediate economic remuneration but to increase influence within an embedded economy.

Although incorporation into larger supply chains has impacted on the industry, it remains embedded within the historical context of the city and its Muslim community. However, embeddedness alone provides too static a construction. In a complex locale where market forces mix with traditional structures, migratory circuits, Islamic moralities and religious reformism, an approach that went beyond embeddedness was required. Utilising ‘informality’ as the primary lens allows exploration of how the supply chain and its associated flows fragment within localised constructions. As a counterpoint, it allows attention to be paid to ways in which outward flows are constructed. This is particularly appropriate in conceiving craft working communities who: “...because of their mobility [...] have tended to be at the edges where cultures meet and mix. Yet at the same time, their very mobility and malleability have put them at the very centre of networks” (Ernst, 2005; p.108). It is the dualistic and multidirectional nature of informality’s networks and connections that I utilise in unpacking the everyday realities of work and life in Saharanpur’s wood industry. In turning to the specificities of the city’s labour force I begin by examining the role of Islam in providing both a moral frame, into which production becomes embedded, and in being the source of some (although not all) connections and cosmopolitanisms. Whilst not representing the only relevant frame, this focus allows us to begin exploring these dualities within a specific context.

³³ Arabic term meaning ‘relationship’ or to ‘to employ a middleman’. Also used in Urdu-speaking areas of India. *Wasta* consists of trust and reciprocity based networks constructed around “tribal values of family and social solidarity [this being...] reinforced by Islam’s emphasis on family, social solidarity (*takaful al ijtimai*) and mutual assistance [...] *wasta* exemplifies the personalised approach to social and political life” (El-Said & Harrigan, 2009; p.1238).

Inside Informality: Informal Regulation & Connections

For Saharanpur's craft workers, economic activity blurs into other areas of life. It is regulated by various informal, negotiated and shifting moral and ethical frames. Various contributors have problematized the notion that informal industries are unregulated, instead pointing to regulatory influences originating from indigenous or religious practice and from other moral or ethical ensembles (Harriss-White, 2003; Meagher, 2009; Ismail, 2013). At its most wide-ranging this has challenged rational economic notions that set pre-capitalist (moral) economies against capitalist (amoral) economies (Browne, 2009). It has exposed how morality around, for example, money is conceived within cultural contexts (Parry & Bloch, 1989)³⁴. As with informality, morality is as much a constituent of economic systems in industrial and post-industrial environments as it is in Saharanpur. This is not to say it is the same. Moral economies are shaped by a variety of regional, national, political, social and religious factors (Browne, 2009) with their own "norms (informal and formal), conventions, values, dispositions and commitments" (Sayer, 2005; cited in Browne, 2009; p.2). In turn, morality is active in shaping informality through both locally and externally produced moral and ethical frames. In the South Asian context, however, recent contributions also contemplate "changing practices of self-fashioning and collective conduct" (Pandian & Ali, 2010; p.9). This proves relevant in Saharanpur where religiosity increasingly focuses on bodily practice and the (re)fashioning of self³⁵. For Muslim craft workers these underpinnings are observed, negotiated and challenged to varying degrees and play out differently across status and gender divides.

Religiously and culturally imbued informal moral and ethical frameworks (sometimes locally produced, sometimes not) interlock in Saharanpur with liberalising market forces. This creates a highly complex scene, involves unintended consequences and interplays with various local power structures. Meagher (2009) provides an example of just how complex these dynamics can be. Writing on informal markets of Nigeria, she suggests that:

³⁴ For example, Parry & Bloch point to cash gifts being seen as inappropriate in some cultures but common in others.

³⁵ See chapter 6.

“...modernising tendencies fostered within the informal economy by popular religious revivalism are being stunted by the relentless pressures of liberalisation, globalisation and pseudo-democratisation. Progressive religious tendencies among the poor are being instrumentalised by religious entrepreneurs and political elites, undermining fragile processes of entrepreneurial class formation taking place within the informal economy”.

(p.397)

In addition to providing a moral framework, Islam can also be seen as a factor in encouraging informality. In Muslim business practice, for example, “relationships are often with friends or family, these relationships [being] characterized by informality” (Rice, 1999; p.353)³⁶. However, as hinted at by Meagher, this does not exist in isolation but interacts with market forces, local forms of religious practice and craft-based structures.

Islam, Economic Regulation & Identity

“...the organisation of economic transactions in Islamic terms serves as an alternative institutional frame to that provided by state laws and regulations. Further, the Islamic framing provides a necessary normative grounding for the rules and conventions governing informal transactions”.

(Ismail, 2013; p.126)

Amin & Thrift (2008) ask us to pay attention to religiously orientated economies, whether they be Buddhist, Christian or Muslim. Likewise Marshall (2009), in her work on Pentecostalism in Nigeria, argues that we should not equate the persistence of religion as central to individual lives and communities with notions of “pre-modern tradition”. Here, though, care must be taken. The economic and social position of Indian Muslims is by no means identical across geographical space (Gayer & Jeffrelot, 2013). Experiences and subjectivities present in everyday lives do not play out homogeneously within the local or global. As Hasan (1997) reminds us, viewing Indian Muslims as always ‘first being Muslim’ is simply neo-orientalist and ignores both diversity and internal stratification. Marsden & Retsikas (2013) suggest care must be taken not to reify or

³⁶ Other areas have also been characterised by informality such as Islamic systems of justice (see: Arjomand, 1989), this forming what Geertz (1983) terms ‘normative witnessing’ where justice is dominated by the personal rather than the formal.

reduce Muslims only to the context of Islam. Or as Coleman (2013) puts it, in the same volume, there is a need to 'de-exceptionalise' Islam and to move away from searching out the 'ideal form'.

In the Indian context Islamic identities overlap with other traditional and local practices which, at times, remain dominant (Mann, 1992). In Saharanpur attitudes towards religiosity were as often ambivalent as they were observant. However, the Muslim identity of wood workers in the city was not a mere side-line to working life. Islam had a variety of implications, including the utilisation of informal forms of credit (Kuran, 2004), an emphasis on independent or entrepreneurial work (Mines, 1972; Sloane, 1999; Osella & Osella, 2009) and more emotive notions bound up in conceptions of Islamic brotherhood (Imam al-Ghazali, 2007)³⁷. To simply ignore Islam would represent a failure to acknowledge an aspect that formed an important part of everyday life. It also formed a component in complex interactions between capitalism, production and other aspects.

The relationship between Islam and capitalism is much debated within Islamic scholarship (Tripp, 2006)³⁸. Tripp cites Jamal Al-Din Al Afgani as arguing that capitalism dissolves "the social bonds which gave Islamic society its meaning as well as order [and that there should be a return to] a moral order founded on the social solidarities of brotherhood and cooperation" (p.33). In other words, the focus is on creating interpersonal and informal economic relationships. There is also a strong emphasis on the value of independent work. In Saharanpur this was variously conceptualised by workers. Labouring at home, in a rented shop or working under others on piece rates enabled people to conceive their labour as 'apna kam' (own work). Although not exclusive to the Muslim community (De Neve, 2005), some unpacking is required. Mines (1972) suggests that there is such a deep-seated sense of labour ownership amongst

³⁷ For Imam al-Ghazali, informality forms the 8th 'duty of brotherhood'. Informality, al-Ghazali suggests, means that: "You should not discomfort your brother with things that are awkward for him. Rather you should ease his heart of its cares and needs, and spare him from having to assume any of your burdens" (p.78).

³⁸ Some contributions focus on the means by which the forces and institutions of capitalism can be made acceptable by giving them an Islamic Aura. Others, however, take a more oppositional approach. Here Tripp (2006) cites Sayid Qutb as taking a position influenced by Marxism, although with less emphasis on class and more on systemic inequality.

Muslims that even executives “complained [...] about their dependent status and noted that their relatives would hold them in greater esteem if they were self-employed” (p.342-343). Sloane (2000) describes how “entrepreneurship has become the main vector of ethnic, religious, and moral worth” (p.35) and Osella & Osella (2009) point to the presence of an ‘entrepreneurial ethic’.

This ‘entrepreneurial ethic’, however, is counterbalanced by a deep-seated ‘community orientation’ embedded in alms giving (Osella & Osella, 2009). This takes two primary forms. *Zakat* (charity), a redistributive system involving the mandatory transfer of wealth to the ‘poor and needy’ and its voluntary counterpart *sadaqah* (Hasan, 2010). Participation in such activity can enable individuals to be seen as charitable and pious, hence increasing their standing in social and business networks (Osella & Osella, 2009). However, donations to education, for example, can also be seen as a means of investing in a skilled workforce (ibid). For workers in Saharanpur it was utilised as a way of showing oneself to be a ‘*sharif aadmi*’ (honourable man) who could be trusted in daily business. However, it can also be seen as counter to the perceived immorality of relations of production where it acts as a means to resist “modernity as an economic and social system, predicated on individual success, accumulation of property, and an engagement with commodities” (Hart, 2010; p.289).

Whilst friends in Saharanpur engaged in forms of charitable giving, other aspects of Islamic economics played a more fundamental role. Regulation of credit, for example, forms a central concern spanning from the “monopolistic returns of rural money-lenders in financially underdeveloped countries [to...] the competitive returns of commercial banks in the industrialised world” (Kuran, 2004; pp.39-40). In Saharanpur access to credit took various forms. Small loans (*karz*) were acquired from neighbours and friends. These were interest-free, short-term and based on trust. Larger loans were taken from Punjabi money lenders who charged interest. Manufacturers utilised forms of interest-based credit but kept this activity hidden for fear of sullyng reputations. Craft workers, running small-scale operations, laboured under a constant veil of credit. Although not based on interest, raw materials were purchased at a higher rate to allow deferred payment. In this way interest became shrouded allowing circumvention of its

illegitimacy. For workers, too, credit was accessed through advance payments from employers creating a form of ‘neo-bondage’ (De Neve, 1999). Relationships between workers and employers are also regulated within Islamic moral frameworks. Certain *Hadiths*³⁹ allude to the importance of such considerations stating, for example: “Pay the wages of labour before their sweat gets dried” and threatening punishment at *Qayamat* (judgment) for one “who employs a labourer and gets the full work done by him but does not pay him his wages” (Tabassum, 2011; p.66). However, such notions often remained unrealised with late payments the norm, adding a further vector to notions of neo-bondage⁴⁰.

Recent contributions from elsewhere have begun to problematize the notion that religion (or faith) is subservient to economy and politics. Writing on Pentecostalism in Nigeria, Marshall (2009) argues that faith is an ‘irreducible element’ which acts as “a mode of historical and political transformation” (p.34). Kuran (2004) suggests the presence of an Islamic ‘sub-economy’ which allows poor workers, migrants and other to connect through their “...shared commitment to Islam even if partly feigned, [...with this keeping] many of their activities within social circles in which information about dishonest behaviour spreads quickly thus providing the basis for mutual trust” (p. 51-52).

However, this discussion forms a problematic terrain. Tripp (2006) argues that “resistance to the general principle of capitalist accumulation may not be the chief form of response [and that instead] Muslims have seized upon the opportunities offered by the restlessness of capitalist enterprise to assert new ways of being Muslim in the world” (p.201). Kuran (2004) suggests that a desire for independence from capitalism has not carried over into everyday practice. Iqtidar (2011) makes a similar point arguing that some Islamic movements, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami⁴¹, have moved away from seeing the state as the primary driver for political projects and shifted towards a focus which utilises “the market as an alternative engine for defining and facilitating moral and

³⁹ Written accounts of the Prophet’s teachings, words and deeds.

⁴⁰ I expand this substantially in chapter 3.

⁴¹ A reformist Islamic movement.

political change” (p.536)⁴². This embodies an approach that coincides with the liberalised market-orientated economics of informality rather than opposing it. Ismail (2013) reminds us that forms of economic organisation within Muslim communities cannot be thought of only in terms of an ‘Islamic economy’ but that they also embody:

“...the tensions and contradictions of the structural transformations associated with economic liberalisation and privatisation [...]. Closely tied with these processes of privatisation and expanded market informality is the production of symbolic and normative frames guiding economic transactions and the broader fields of social exchange”.

(p.107 & p.126).

Rudnyckyj (2009) takes this further, proposing in his work in a post-liberalisation Indonesian steel plant, the presence of a ‘spiritual economy’ which relied on individual responsibility and accountability only to god. For Rudnyckyj this fed into an ethic where “employees were to be proactive, responsible and accountable” (p.116). Here then narratives of piety and religious duty became active in creating an ‘Islamic work culture’ which produced workers who would be industrious and maintain a sense of commitment that had previously been gained through the guarantee of employment and welfare. Beyond the workplace, too, discussions have focused on the ways in which economic transformations and Islam coincide. Atia (2013), for example, describes how charitable Islamic activity in Egypt interacts with processes of liberalisation to produce “pious neoliberalism”. For Atia charitable activity should not be seen as separate from economy, nor should they be seen as absent in the production of ‘neoliberal subjects’. Instead she suggests that, even within informal neighbourhoods, “pious neoliberalism generates self-regulating and ethical subjects as faith and market discipline them simultaneously” (p.xviii). These contributions act to remind us that religion and economy are not distinct spheres but play out in concert with each other, at times conflicting and at times reinforcing. In Saharanpur, this occurs in complex ways within an arena of production where there are no clearly defined factory walls. Instead, economic activity relies on complex connections embedded in shifting everyday practices and intersected by various circulations of religious and non-religious origin.

⁴² There is a strong distinction between the Tabligh Jamaat and the Jamaat-e-Islami. Whilst the latter is first and foremost a political organisation, the former is distinctly a-political in nature and has never focused on the state as a realm of specific interest but on day-to-day life and practice of Muslim individuals.

Connections & Identity: Muslim Networks in & Beyond Saharanpur

A variety of formal and informal connections emanate from the religious identity of Saharanpur's woodworking community. Here there are parallels with discussions on informality previously outlined. With the reconceptualisation of older notions of the global economy in terms of a formal core versus an informal periphery (Phillips, 2011; De Boeck and Plissart, 2004)⁴³, scholars have also come to rethink how sites of production are interrelated and how capitalism is produced within the niches and networks that connect them (Tsing, 2009). In a similar way the movement of Islamic ideas, moralities and discourses has been shown to be circulatory in nature (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1990; Noor, 2012; Azra, 2004; Feener and Sevea, 2009)⁴⁴, rather than moving unidirectionally from a core (usually seen as the Arabian Peninsula) to a receiving periphery (i.e. cooke & Lawrence, 2005). Feener and Sevea (2009) warn that "...most existing histories [...] end up looking like supply chains with "Islam" as the commodity" (p.xvi). They suggest instead that our study of "...the connections between Muslim communities around the world must be one that engages dynamic multi-directional phenomena" (p.xiv). This is illustrated in both historical and contemporary contributions. Azra (2004), for example, illuminates the complexities of scholarly networks between the Malay-Indonesian peninsula and the Middle East in the 17th and 18th centuries. Although the Middle East was highly influential, centres of learning in Mecca and Medina also attracted many scholars from South East Asia who were very much a part of shaping Islamic discourse and carrying notions of reform and renewal back with them. Eickelman and Piscatori (1990) suggest that today such processes play out beyond scholarly networks as "contemporary labour migration [...] has facilitated changes in religious institutions and practices as important as those inspired by earlier generations of elite Muslim intellectuals in the Middle East and Indian sub-continent" (p.5).

This emphasis on circulation and interconnectedness leads us to consider the ways in which Muslim and other cosmopolitanisms act to shape Saharanpur's informal spaces

⁴³ This critique emanates from both structuralist and post-structuralist contributions.

⁴⁴ In his detailed description of the Tabligh Jamaat in South East Asia, Farish Noor (2012) describes a scene constituted by a variety of overlapping networks which at times cooperate with each other and at times conflict.

of work and labour. Work on 'Muslim cosmopolitanisms' has challenged notions of the 'west' as the place where the circulation of ideas (in the post-enlightenment period at least) was pre-eminent (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1990; Zubaida, 2002). In the more contemporary context it has revealed how migrants, travellers and pilgrims re-negotiate reformism, practice, consumption, fashion, art, work and daily life (Green, 2011, Gardner, 1995; Osella & Osella, 2007; Marsden, 2008; Buggenhagen, 2012; Dadi, 2006). These discussions are relevant to Saharanpur where the circulation of migrants⁴⁵, and domestic or international *Jamaats*⁴⁶ generate further connections. This in turn interacts with cosmopolitan connections emanating from other identities, 'western' or broader Indian cultural influences and subaltern networks not defined by religion.

Conceptually cosmopolitanism has many faces. It can be seen as bound up in 'western' philosophical thought or colonial projects. In this sense it is something imposed from above (Mignolo, 2000). Alternatively it can be seen as counter to hegemonic forms of globalisation, as rooted in the diversity of the subaltern classes or as a "project that connects [...] diverse subaltern satellites appropriating and transforming Western global designs" (ibid; p.745). This is not the cosmopolitanism found among global elites, but is instead representative of what Gidwani (2006) refers to as 'subaltern cosmopolitanism'⁴⁷. Here cosmopolitanism is seen not only as connectedness to other spaces and places but also as a 'strategic resource' providing "a set of imaginaries and practices that can be used to extend opportunities or consolidate power" (Jeffrey & McFarlane, 2008; p.420). Workers and others in Saharanpur regularly expressed markers of this cosmopolitan identity, sometimes through the reiteration of experiences beyond Saharanpur or through a sense of belonging to a larger Islamic community. However, this is not to confuse the cosmopolitan nature of informal craft workers in Saharanpur with increased social mobility. Subaltern forms of cosmopolitanism play out

⁴⁵ See Part 3.

⁴⁶ See chapter 6.

⁴⁷ Although varied in form Gidwani & Shivakrishnan (2002) argue that cosmopolitanism, at any level, embodies three main traits. Firstly, cosmopolitans are able to embody a degree of cultural versatility. Secondly, they have a sense of the 'spatial diffusion of ideas' rather than being concerned only with the parochial. Thirdly, there is "a geographical imagination secured by notions of discrete, self-evident places and subjects awaiting transformation through the cultivation of a universal ethos" (p.343). However, this does not necessarily facilitate the production of 'progressive political agendas' (p.362). As Harvey (2000) reminds us, cosmopolitan connections are also fundamental to globalised production and consumption and that cosmopolitanism has acquired so many interpretations that it becomes ineffective in facilitating social justice.

at various levels of hardship and affluence (Gidwani & Shivakrishnan, 2002). As Breckenridge et al (2002) put it:

“Cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism’s upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of diaspora and migrants represent the spirit of cosmopolitan community”

(p.6).

There is also a risk in over-emphasising cosmopolitanism as it guides our eye away from marginalisation which leaves many Indian Muslims with little choice but to engage in informal employment. Breman (2002), for example, argues that informality of labour is intimately tied with the segregation of space along communal lines, further fragmenting workforces. Indian Muslims are present in the upper echelons of the Indian economy but in disproportionately small numbers (Harriss-White, 2003). Lists of the wealthiest and most powerful in Indian business contain noticeably few Muslims^{48/49} (Forbes, 2013) and among those present there is a bias toward particular caste or *biraderi* (community)⁵⁰ groups (Khalidi, 2004)⁵¹. Muslims, working class and middle class alike, are often tolerated only when confined to ghettoised spaces (Gayer & Jaffrelot, 2013)⁵². However, there are emerging middle classes of skilled IT workers, traders and scholars (ibid) who push their own agendas within the Muslim community and beyond. This may involve upliftment through education (Jaffrelot & Thomas, 2012) or the promotion of reformism, with the two often intersecting (Osella & Osella, 2009).

However, it is notable in literature on Muslim craft workers in North India, and on North Indian Muslims in general, that the focus is on ‘forces’ not ‘connections’⁵³. These forces originate from a state which pushes Muslim craft workers ‘to the margins’ (Mohsini, 2010), from communal tensions and from influences within the Muslim community. As

⁴⁸ Notable exceptions include Azim Premji (India’s 4th wealthiest person) and Yusuf Hamid (India’s 28th wealthiest). In the top hundred there are, however, only four Muslims present in total (twocircles.net, 2011)

⁴⁹ It should, however, be noted that such elites tend to be dominated by particular *biraderis* with lists of the wealthiest mainly involving merchant castes such as the *Baniyas*.

⁵⁰ Can apply to caste, clan, community or brotherhood.

⁵¹ See chapter 2.

⁵² This differs substantially across the country with South Indian Muslims occupying a much stronger position.

⁵³ This contrasts with work on South Indian Muslims where connections and circulation feature much more prominently (i.e. Osella & Osella 2003, 2011; Prakash, 1998).

Saberwal (2010) argues, the “experience (the push) of collective violence, along with (the pull of) Deoband, Barelwi⁵⁴, and related influences, persuaded growing fractions of Muslims to withdraw into communally marked spaces” (p. 16). Muslims increasingly find themselves confined to roughly demarcated neighbourhoods identifiable as ghettoised to varying degrees (Gayer & Jaffrelot, 2013). However, the focus in this thesis on informality as constituted through connections, niches and networks reveals a more fluid and cosmopolitan scene. Here, a variety of institutional factors played their part. However, everyday life, and the connections therein, was shaped not just by economy, markets and religion, but also in concert with emotive and affective considerations.

Emotive Networks: Informality beyond Institutional Connections

[Affect] “...speaks on the one hand to the extent to which emotions, feelings, relationships are ‘put to work’ in post-Fordist capitalism, and on the other to the immanent human cooperative capacities and potentialities that may be set free by such labour”.

(Gill & Pratt, 2008)

“The moral base of informality is personal exceptionalism, affection, [and] love [...] which require spontaneity, flexibility and relaxation of official norms to accommodate particular needs and wants”.

(Fernandez, 2000; p.30)

Whereas Fernandez (2000) sees it as specific to ‘informals’, anthropologists and others have shown the relevance of affective considerations across economic spaces and regimes. Hochschild’s (1983) study of airline cabin crew, for example, discusses the commodification of emotion. Here, alongside Marx’s emphasis on the alienating nature of physical and mental labour under capitalism, Hochschild adds ‘emotion work’ which requires employees to induce or suppress feelings. A variety of contributions have moved beyond ‘commodification’ and brought attention to the ways emotions underpin

⁵⁴ The madrasa at Deoband is the central school of thought for what is broadly known as the Deobandi movement. The Deobandi and Barelwi were originally a single movement. The two split and developed different interpretations of what reformist Islam should embody. Although there are a variety of differences in daily practice of Islam, for example a greater engagement with Sufi saints among Barelwis, the fundamental difference relates to The Prophet Mohammad. For Barelwis, The Prophet is the ‘model man’ and a unique man who possessed powers beyond mortals. For Deobandis, The Prophet is the ideal of perfection and piety but should not be venerated as super-human. Such otherworldly power lies only with Allah (Alam, 2008). Tension between the two movements can be high.

economic action everywhere. This allows us to move away from Orientalist assumptions (Richard & Rudnyckij, 2009) and avoid “a polarised framework opposing, for example, modernity and tradition, city and countryside, centre and periphery, [...] the “hard rationality” of liberal capitalism generated in urban space and the “soft irrationality” of a rural “economy of affection”” (De Boeck & Plissart, 2004; p.41).

Business elites continue to utilise face to face informality as a way of building networks, creating connections and circumventing formal regulation (Miszta, 2002; Granovetter, 1985). Adrenalin-driven passions of a trading floor (Hassoun, 2005) continue to create markets that are neither locationally, institutionally or culturally dis-embedded (Sassen, 2005). Traders and others continue to seek social information in computerised market data, as a guide to decisions regarding which stocks to buy and sell (Zaloom, 2003). In other words, informality, in this sense, is present across economic spaces and regimes. This brings us, then, to the final level of discussion on the formal/informal dichotomy introduced at the start of this thesis⁵⁵. Whilst this plays a part across the global economy, we must be careful not to flatten the terrain. Risk-taking in global stock exchanges does not involve the same emotional vestiges as in Saharanpur’s gullies.

Across disciplines, contexts and localities emotive and affective aspects of economic action have been discussed in ways that illustrate the diversity with which affective considerations play out. At tea stalls and roadsides, for example, the anxiety and anticipation of unemployed but educated youths in Niger and India drives young men to avoid engaging with labour markets in order to hold out for the dream of something worthy of their education. Here an ‘economy of leisure’ is built, as lack of money and time to pass brings individuals together into collectives based around tea drinking, banter and waiting (Jeffrey, 2010; Masquelier, 2013). On the other hand business school academics develop strategies for controlling emotion and affect in the workplace in order to manage labour forces and as an “essential piece in understanding how work is done and how it is done better” (Barsade & Gibson, 2007; p.54). This has translated into technologies within diverse sites, from female Walmart ‘associate’ workers who are

⁵⁵ See page 5.

motivated through an appeal to “Christian family values in the cause of corporate sales” (Moreton, 2006; cited in Tsing, 2009; p.159) to factory labour in India’s Special Economic Zones (SEZs) where “feelings of responsibility, autonomy and ownership [translate] into dreams and desires [...] allied with the goal of profit making” (Cross, 2014; p.101).

However, transposing this into an informal working environment, such as Saharanpur’s, requires us to flip the rationale. Rather than emotive and affective considerations becoming something that capital seeks to alter or control, it is instead a further shifting realm into which production becomes embedded. In an economy that is deeply rooted in a milieu of social relations, where the love of a father for his son overlaps with family-based production, where women pass work to daughters and neighbours, where childhood friends may become *thēkēdārs* (middlemen) emotional connections constantly intermingle with production and work. Vestiges, such as ‘ownership of work’, an ‘entrepreneurial ethic’ or commitment to a ‘team’ or ‘family’ (Rudnyckyj, 2009) are already present. In other words, it is many of the affective aspects of a socially embedded ‘informal economy’ that is now sought to be re-embedded (albeit in somewhat differently constructed ways) in factories, offices and other spaces of ‘formal’ economic activity. On a broader scale, too, it is increasingly central to the emergence of new labour arrangements based on ostensibly ‘entrepreneurial’ yet precarious work in increasingly informalised, ‘developed’ economies (Gill & Pratt, 2008). Likewise, for Saharanpur’s craft workers it is an important part of daily life in the bazaar. An ‘investment’ in *wasta* (Eleyachar, 2010), for example, requires the building of emotive as well as reciprocal links. Likewise, small working collectives form around expressions of friendship and intimacy as well as instrumental considerations of improved economic situation or the ability to negotiate deals and conditions of work more effectively.

‘Affect’, then, is varied and plays out in collusion with non-human factors such as the circulation of objects or images and with spatial considerations. ‘Affect’, argue Richard & Rudnyckyj (2009), does “not circulate from one sovereign subject to another. Rather an economy of affect forms a milieu in which subjects find themselves enmeshed [...] affect is less an object that circulates than something in which people find themselves circulating” (p.73). The ‘affective scene’ in Saharanpur’s wood *mohallas* is constituted

through the variety of intersections and connections discussed in previous sections. It may involve emotional connections to the performance of Islamic ritual or bonds formed through shared experiences of migration. In a practical sense affect can be seen as a force that makes us act beyond rationality alone. This may involve emotionally influenced actions and reactions. However, it is also usurped by contemporary capitalism as a means of controlling labour forces. In Neo-Weberian terms it shapes workers, consumers and others by extending the requirements of capitalism beyond labour provision alone and towards a 'commitment of the spirit' (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2000). In Neo-Marxist orientated accounts it can be seen as a new frontline in struggles between labour and capital (Hardt, 1999). The emotive engagements described in following chapters hold true to this dualistic dimension, providing both networks of obligation essential to production and degrees of cooperation and empowerment.

In this sense, then, it is double edged. Just as dreams of a better future resulting from the building of Indian SEZs may trigger feelings of anticipation for riches to come among local residents in Andhra Pradesh (Cross, 2014), so passions may ignite oppositional protest and create rapid alliance formation at a Nuclear Power Corporation orchestrated 'consultation' in Gujarat (Kaur, 2013). On a larger scale 'affect' can be seen as harbouring the potentiality for building resistance and 'class' action even within arenas and across spaces where affiliations are divided and alliances fractured by other identity-based orientations (Hardt, 1999). Although Ahmed's (2004) netnography of white supremacist organisations reminds us that collective action produced via affective links is not always of a positive nature, it can be seen as "a starting point for building a politics in which transformative collaborations across difference form the radical heart of possibility" (Tsing, 2012; p. 36). This, then, takes us full circle and deposits us back where this thesis opened, with a discussion of the problematic nature of class in an 'informal economy'. It begs us to ask if the potential for transforming the situation of labour under post-liberalisation or late capitalism lies in homogenous class action or in "celebrating the connections and intersections that constitute [...] diverse routes and traditions of resistance" (Featherstone, 2008; p.187). As with the areas examined in previous sections of this introduction, duality shows itself to be present across the various scales of informality. In the following, final substantive section, I outline an

approach which, I argue, allows us to deal effectively with the duality of informality within a broader global context whilst not losing sight of the local.

Informality & 'Niches': Supply Chain Capitalism, Connections & Constraints

Given this complexity, how can we effectively conceive 'informal' spaces, such as Saharanpur's wood industry with its associated networks of labour and production, within the frame of a larger 'global' context? How should we set out to understand both the constrictive and enabling facets of informality? How do we take account of connections and cosmopolitanisms whilst continuing to acknowledge the exploitative nature of global production networks and the fundamentals of a political economy based in class and other intersections of inequality? How do we move beyond a focus on embeddedness without losing sight of cultural specificities? Here I argue that an emphasis on niches⁵⁶, or 'niche capitalism', offers an effective structure from which to begin. I create analytical space by building from recent theoretical work by Tsing (2009/2012) focusing on 'supply chain capitalism'. Whilst not explicitly framed in terms of informality, Tsing examines 'informal' forms of labour and practice by addressing two primary concerns. Firstly, she explores how supply chains connect diverse locales and ambiguous actors with processes of global integration. Secondly, she focuses on the ways in which 'organisational styles and subjectivities' allow global capitalism to thrive, not on homogeneity, but diversity. For Tsing the key here is attention to 'culture' as a constituent in understanding how supply chains work⁵⁷. The dynamics of class, production and labour must account for 'intersectionality'⁵⁸ through which capitalism "incorporates contingencies without forming a single, homogenous structure" (p.152). In other words, attention must be given to the intersection of considerations including gender, *biraderi* (caste), ethnicity and religion.

⁵⁶ I find this a more effective articulation than 'clusters'. A cluster can be defined as having "reasonably stable boundaries, one or more prevailing industries, a population of relatively small firms that interact through networks and a culturally rooted population" (Harriss-White, 2003; p.203). A 'niche', on the other hand, is more porous. In ecology a niche can be seen as one's position within a community, as a situation of life or work or as a position within a market. It may appear comfortable (potentially concealing exploitative relations) or not. It can be shaped from within but only in concert with its surroundings.

⁵⁷ This is not a new concept and is reflected in much of what has emerged from 'cultural studies', feminism and post-colonialism. However, Tsing's framing proves particularly useful.

⁵⁸ Tsing (2009) defines this as "the diversity through which women and men of varied class niches and racial, ethnic, national, sexual, and religious positions negotiate power and inequality" (p.152).

Tsing sees the persistence of such niches as being the core of contemporary capitalism. Niches are produced by unequal identities through which supply chain capitalism can link with “independent entrepreneurs, making it possible for commodity processes to span the globe. Labor, nature, and capital are mobilized in fragmented but linked economic niches; thus, supply chain capitalism focuses our attention on questions of diversity within structures of power” (p.148-149). For Tsing niches are not static but are bound up in various reconfigurations of power and inequality within the supply chain. This can involve the emergence of new niches or new forms of diversity. Here, “workers learn to perform within these tropes, and particularly to express markers of their difference to show their agility and efficiency as contractors. Such performances entrench the niche structure of the economy, reaffirming the profitability of supply chain capitalism” (p. 151)⁵⁹. These ‘performances’ are sometimes created by capital but also originate from cultural and historical factors. This is not entirely new. Several aspects of Tsing’s argument are present in structurally orientated renderings of Indian labour (i.e. Harris-White, 2003) or discussions of embeddedness (i.e. White, 2004). The primary divergence occurs in considerations of class. Rather than a homogenous class being seen as the ideal, Tsing (2012) argues that class is “formed in the articulation between the histories of non-capitalist status forms and capitalism” (p.41)⁶⁰. In other words, class formation is not reliant on the formation of a homogenous consciousness. Collective action can occur within fragmented yet connected structures. Niches are not rigid but workers themselves can be active in carving them out:

“Supply chains tap and vitalize performances of so-called noneconomic features of identity. Labor is both recruited and motivated by these performances. On the one hand, workers become complicit with their own exploitation. On the other hand, they express hopes and desires that exceed the disciplinary apparatus”.

(p.157)

In Saharanpur craft workers occupy niches in gendered or status specific ways, sometimes as labour or sometimes as petty producers. Being a craft worker overlaps with being an ‘owner’, being a ‘businessperson’, being an ‘entrepreneur’, being a

⁵⁹ I am conscious that this represents a shift from the primarily structural literature discussed thus far. However, as I will show during the course of this thesis, there need not be a tension between the two.

⁶⁰ Non-capitalist, Tsing points out, is not pre-capitalist or pre-modern.

‘middleman’ (or woman), being an ‘artisan’, or being a ‘worker’. Additionally, there are factors around skill, identity and culture which set those trading on their woodworking knowledge apart from other labouring populations. This is not to undermine the marginal status of Saharanpur’s craft-working community, but rather to acknowledge the multiplicity of roles present. In addition, the emergence and disappearance of niches serves to remind us that craft industries are susceptible to shifts within regional and global markets whilst also being shaped by religious moralities, local practice and emotive connections. Niches are ‘carved out’ but only within the spaces that the constraints of structural bounding makes available (Tsing, 2000).

This allows attention to be paid to connections within and between niches and to unpack further layers of exploitation resulting from unequal relations between places⁶¹. Dualistically it also allows us to consider how connections may hold opportunities. It allows us to explore the ways in which dreams, aspirations, hopes and fears (Cross, 2014) intermingle in driving workers, artisans, contractors and others. It allows us to acknowledge a spatial context bounded in communal urban identities (Gayer & Jaffrelot, 2012) and blurred realms of work and life (Harvey, 1995), public and private (Brenner, 1998; Kazi, 1999, White, 2004)⁶². A conception of capitalism as operating through niches adds to this by acknowledging that at all levels there is a degree of duality. Within each niche, however shaped, both exploitation and possibility cohabit (Tsing, 2012). Niches can be ‘carved out’ and agency expressed but only within the context of the structural landscape and the subjectivities or imaginations of workers, artisans and others.

Conclusion

This thesis, then, engages with a space of labour and work that can be seen as being produced through informality and niches. It follows inward and outward connections in the context of an ensemble of factors: The supply chain and its utilisation of diversity and locally embedded relations; localised forms of historically embedded production

⁶¹ Tsing focuses on uneven relations within niches based on gender, caste etc. This alludes to considering uneven relations between niches such as rural and urban, regulated and unregulated, or between labour importing nations and labour exporting nations.

⁶² I will return to this point in much greater detail shortly and in chapter 3.

and associated networks; the friendships and family relations upon which these networks are constructed; the effect of a variety of Islamic circulations and its associated forms of economic organisation; and the emotive underpinnings of working and migrant life. The combining of these facets reveal a space that is not solely shaped by ‘western derived forms of capitalism’ but is also developed through local practice (Chari, 2004). Building from a focus on connections and circulations past and present, I argue that informality as a condition of labour and employment can be seen as having been produced, not just through liberalising policies in Europe and the US, but through capitalisms engagement with spaces such as Saharanpur’s wood industry. This engagement proceeds the liberalisation policies of the late 20th century and instead is rooted in the colonial and post-colonial eras. Whilst this takes us to a variety of geographical locations and levels of abstraction, the chapters that follow are primarily rooted in the ethnographic account. As such there is a degree of ‘messiness’. However, this is intended to reflect the untidiness of ethnography, to leave the methodology exposed and to acknowledge the complexity of the lives of Saharanpur’s Muslim craft workers.

Methodology: An Overview

“[Ethnography] does not follow a neat pattern but is a messy interaction between the research problem, the design of the research and data collection and analysis”

(Brewer, 2000; p.103)

The methodology of this thesis focuses strongly on participation, everyday experiences, narratives and life stories. However, in considering connections that constitute the ‘local’ it is also critical to consider the ‘global’ and, in the context of everyday stories, to deliberate on the ways in which they “*connect to other bigger stories*” (Osella & Osella, 2006; p. 569). This avoids treating ‘cultural settings’ as isolated units bounded within homogenised practices (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). In the context of moving ethnographic study into the ‘global’, it is possible to disconnect from ‘place’ altogether and to bring ethnographic focus onto circulation and flows (Appadurai, 1988). Although this offers possibilities for understanding ‘hidden relations of

production’ and the movement of objects, capital and people, ‘place’ as an ethnographic location matters as it is “place where global flows fragment and are transformed into something place bound and particular. [...] There can be no territorial distinctions between the "global" transcending of place and the "local" making of places” (Tsing, 2000; p. 338). ‘Place’, then, can be central to global connections and not just an end point. Care must be taken not to side-line ‘place’ as anthropologists and others become increasingly caught up in the excitement of the global (Donner & De Neve, 2007). Ethnographers have repeatedly found that social and other networks are not merely observed but are a realm into which we are drawn (Johnson, 1994). Indeed, my own fieldwork did not set out to cover multiple locations. Instead, it was the mobility of friends in the wood working gullies that drew me to follow migrational networks. In practical terms a variety of methods were used. It is to a brief outline of the applied methodology of fieldwork which took place over eighteen months from November 2010 until June 2012 that I now turn.

Small-Scale Surveys

Early stages of research applied formal surveys and interviews. Working with an assistant and old friend, Abdul Nasir, a total of 174 surveys were conducted in informal workshops. 86 were conducted with workers and 88 with artisans⁶³ in alternate gullies of three neighbourhoods. If happy to participate, both the owner and each member of staff were surveyed. An additional 40 surveys were carried out with wholesalers and exporters. Although the surveys contained predetermined questions, many extended into informal interviews. This provided a snapshot of the industry, gave a sense of the mobility of workers, a rough makeup of the workforce and networks through which workers were recruited. An unexpected benefit of this approach was of an ethical nature as formal surveys allowed people to become aware of my reasons for being in the neighbourhood. This became clear when two young men passed us and one asked the other “who is that”, his friend replied “oh he is writing some research book”. In

⁶³ Artisans were defined as those owning or renting a workshop in which they may or may not employ staff. They were distinguished from ‘owners’ by being asked if they also worked most days with their hands. It should be noted that this creates some overlap with factory owners as some owners (who did not work with their hands) ran smaller operations than some artisans.

latter stages two additional rounds of surveys were conducted. These I carried out alone. The first focused on factory workers and was undertaken in conjunction with interviews of owners, which proved an effective way of gaining access. 93 surveys were conducted and again extended to open discussion. A final round of 100 questionnaires was undertaken in the last weeks of fieldwork which dealt specifically with migration. 37 were undertaken in factories and the remainder in smaller workshops. Demographic questions overlapped with earlier surveys further increasing the sample size for these areas.

Ethnographic Interviews

Around fifty interviews were conducted with homeworkers, factory workers, artisans, factory owners. Some were on a one-to-one basis and others group-based. This was supplemented by many informal discussions with friends and others. Unlike standard interviews, ethnographic interviews require loose structuring of questions and greater dialogue with respondents (Davies, 1999). Material was allowed to enter the process whether or not directly linked to the topic. Here the aim was to gather *“rich, detailed data directly from participants in the social worlds under study”* (Heyl, 2001; p. 369). Sampling was through the ‘snowball’ method and relied on networks of individuals. LeCompte & Schensul (1999) identify interviewing as one of the more effective methods of narrative enquiry. Attention was given to the impact status, gender and class can have on an interview (Davies, 1999). Interviews were conducted in a variety of localities including factories, workshops, teashops and respondents’ homes. In each case the setting, those present and the relationship with myself all played a part in the narratives told. Whilst this cannot be avoided awareness of such effects was maintained.

Life Stories

Until recently, life stories, or life histories, have been little used in the Indian context (Arnold & Blackburn, 2004). Twelve life story interviews were conducted mostly with those with whom I had a close relationship. Most took place on a one-to-one basis with no one else present. To this end the majority were conducted in my small rented room

and were usually preceded by dinner. Whilst life stories have been used by ethnographers in a variety of disciplines since the early 1900s (Lassiter, 2005), I took the view that life stories can be revealing, not just of subjective attitudes to processes of change, but also in understanding the penetration and impact of capitalist social relations (Tausig, 1980). Life stories do not sit in geographical and ethnic isolation, but are connected to larger tales influenced by global processes, the historical context and perceptions of the future (Osella & Osella, 2006). It is also pertinent to emphasise some of the problematic aspects of life stories including the remembered aspect of what is being presented, the areas emphasised (and not emphasised) by the teller, and the impact of the developing relationship between myself and the informant (Davies, 1999).

Participation & Observation: Friendship & Work

“In contrast to one-time, retrospective surveys, a primary means of studying relationships, friendship as method involves sustained immersion in participants’ lives, offering a processual and longitudinal perspective”.

(Tillman-Healy, 2003; p.745)

If informal work spaces are rooted in ‘a myriad of social relations’ (Gille & O’Riain, 2002) then the ethnographer must become enmeshed in those relations. The connections therein can be allowed to guide research and carry the researcher, whilst also acknowledging that the researcher’s active position will likely alter such relations. Although I deployed mixed methods, it was participatory research and the relationships formed therein, that inform most of this ethnography. This involved living, socialising, working and migrating with friends in the city and beyond. Many of these relationships, particularly those with the individuals mentioned in the ‘prologue’, became very close. A great deal of time, both in work and social spaces, was shared together. For me this meant adapting to the expectations of being a friend. However, as time went on I became accustomed to these expectations and still remain in regular contact today.

The foundation for building relationships was my participation in work. I provide a much more descriptive account of this process in the brief chapter entitled ‘Interval One’, so deal with it only briefly here. Ethnographies that utilise participation in work continue to show its ongoing value in furthering our understanding. Some concentrate on

exposing the technologies of control present in production regimes (i.e. Ong, 1988; Rofel, 1999); others focus on ‘embodied’ experiences of work (Cross, 2012; Marchand, 2008)⁶⁴. Participation can, then, enable an understanding of the nature of structures present and the degree to which agency is exercised. It can open up avenues to understanding how people think about and engage with work as well as what work does to the person and body (Prentice, 2008). For me the most important aspect was that it allowed me to become a part of the social space of my informants, to a degree at least.

Research Assistants: Accessing Spaces & Negotiating Positionality

Most research was conducted alone. However, two areas were undertaken with assistance. Preliminary surveys were undertaken with Abdul Nasir, an old friend from Landour Language School where I studied on several occasions. Abdul’s sister, Ayesha Ansari assisted with interviewing women. Her marriage had taken place in Saharanpur, the family’s ancestral home, some years ago. Together with her husband, Afsar Ansari, an egg wholesaler, and two daughters she occupied a property leased from a *masjid* not far from the woodworking *mohallas*. Through my historical connection with her relatives I arranged to rent a small room on the roof of their house. This was my base throughout the fieldwork and I got to know the family well. As research progressed I became conscious of an area to which I had little access. Although I had been able to speak to some women in larger factories I had little access to homeworkers. This led Ayesha and I to begin discussing her involvement. Ayesha conducted 100 interviews, of which around fifteen were followed up by both of us to gain greater depth. It was through routes Ayesha opened and her tireless work that this thesis is able to engage with the lives of homeworking women. Whilst there are many women whose stories are used here, and some with whom I, too, was able to develop a degree of relationship, I was never able to gain the sort of access that I had to male workers. As such it is critical, not just to acknowledge the role played by Ayesha, but also to be aware of the extent to which her voice is present in telling and interpreting the stories of others.

⁶⁴ Those working on ‘embodied’ work are primarily focused on craft and artisan environments (for an exception see Prentice, 2008), whilst Ong and Rofel focus on large-scale factory environments. Tausig (1980) reminds us that groups at the periphery of the capitalist system experiencing transformation (in this group he includes artisans) are more expressive in cultural interpretations and resistances than those who are naturalised to the capitalist system.

The Chapters

The initial section consisting of two chapters, entitled 'Journeys In', provides two avenues of focus that approach the fieldwork site. The first chapter covers the historical context. The situation of Indian Muslims and Indian craft workers is discussed alongside the history of the city and its industry. This comes from secondary sources and from the accounts of informants. The chapter provides some challenges to what has often been painted as the 'standard story' of artisanal decline and Muslim marginalisation. It also exposes the variety of forms of power and influence present and illustrates the importance of considering informal relations and connections, as being constituted in a historicised as well as a spatial and local context. The second chapter provides a detailed description of the supply chain and seeks to locate lives within it. It acknowledges the deeply embedded nature of production. I suggest that these are variously formed as a consequence of global processes and within the context of 'old' and 'new' localised practices of extraction. Beginning with large-scale exporters the chapter descends through various layers of production finishing with female homeworkers. However, in focusing on homeworkers, the chapter critiques the suggestion that the supply chain stops at the front door. Instead, women themselves are highly active in passing and transferring work among each other. Here, as Tsing (2009) suggests, the variety and 'diversity of niches' present often fits into, rather than challenges, global supply chains, a process that is negotiated through various levels of 'putting out'. The chapter argues that much of the labour force is controlled through informal obligations and connections as well as forms of credit and bondage in a chain of supply filled with ambiguous actors.

The second section entitled 'Journeys Within' comprises four short chapters focusing on relations among male and female workers in highly gendered production environments. The first chapter follows on from where the last section finished in focusing on female workers. The chapter continues to focus on connections and social relations amongst women but also gives attention to the ways in which women negotiate moral considerations around the spaces and networks within which they labour. The remaining chapters are situated in the male-dominated spaces of the gullies. After an initial scene-setting 'interval', which describes my experience of learning to work, the section begins with a focus on apprenticeship. The chapter emphasises the role of the

ustad-shagird system in reproducing the labour force and how it is changing as a result of export-driven production. The third chapter of this section focuses on Islamic reform and its relationship with work and labour in the gullies. Here attention is also given to the way in which reformist practice is viewed and embodied by individuals themselves. The final chapter focuses on friendships. Whilst situating friendship in a milieu of social relations, I argue that gendered and tightly packed neighbourhoods of work and residence ferment close bonds between workers which create complex relations of support and obligation. These emotive relations not only underpin production in the city but also feed into the creation of migration circuits.

The third section of two final chapters, entitled 'Journeys Out', follows these networks beyond the city. It opens with a brief 'interval' which sets the scene through a discussion of literature aimed at linking internal and international migration. It considers the history of Muslim networks and the part they play in the contemporary scene. The first chapter deals with migration to other areas of India. Throughout the fieldwork I made various trips with friends as they sought work elsewhere. The chapter examines the historical emergence of a 'culture of migration' and its contemporary constitution. By following the networks present, the chapter illuminates patterns of labour recruitment and migration. It also examines the importance of destination spaces and relationships formed whilst away. These relationships between men living and working in confined spaces for sustained periods are close and intimate, but also drive decision-making regarding future destinations as individuals seek out not just paid work but also old friends. The second chapter of this section deals with the rapidly emerging story of Gulf migration. Whilst Saharanpur has a long history of migration to the Gulf, based on the demand for skilled craft work, it has grown rapidly in the last decade. This is a pattern repeated elsewhere in North India and has had a dramatic effect, particularly in Muslim communities. The chapter details the impact of such migration within Saharanpur and examines both the views of those who remain behind and those who return. It also follows migrants from Saharanpur to the Gulf and enters the work camps in *Shahjah* and *Abu Dhabi*⁶⁵, where my fieldwork eventually led me. In so doing, processes driving Gulf

⁶⁵ Princely state in the United Arab Emirates.

migration are examined as being intimately tied up with those present in internal migration, particularly in the ways that workers utilise informal networks to access work.



Carvers at Work

PART ONE

‘JOURNEYS IN’

Chapter Two

From 'Then' to 'Now': Crafting & Connections across Time



Saharanpur Station (1907): Craftsmen used to sell their wares through the windows of halted trains, a practice no longer allowed

“Because we focus on dynamic social relations rather than static sites and see localities as politically and historically constructed, our approach to global ethnography requires the historicization of the locality and of local and extra-local social relations”.

(Gille & O’Riain, 2002; 288)

This chapter fulfils two purposes. It historically embeds the ethnography and provides a further literature review linking with the introduction. In so doing I argue that, although impacted in various ways by colonialism, loss of Muslim political and economic power, and by the policies of liberalisation, craftwork in the city has been characterised by resistance, change and adaptation. This chapter is a historical account of the wood industry and its labour force. Here, I broaden the discussion to include a history of craft and artisan work in India and of North Indian Muslims. I draw on secondary historical data, life stories and family histories. This blurring of textual and life story-based

narratives requires some brief justification. As Arnold & Blackburn (2004) point out, “in descending the social scale from elite to subaltern, an emphasis upon individual selves, are often seen by historians to display a “romantic” tendency, attributing to individuals an agency and consciousness, even an “Enlightenment rationalism”, they could not possibly possess” (p.4). However, Arnold & Blackburn go on to point out that life stories represent a meaningful engagement in exploring, not just individuals, but broader social and emotional facets of the everyday. Throughout this chapter I retain awareness that these are ‘stories’. The remembered and told or retold narratives that I present are wrapped up in a variety of genres, ways and cultures of telling (Gardner, 2002). Building on a substantial body of work dealing with Indian artisans in the historical context (i.e. Roy, 2007; Haynes, 2001; Kumar 1988; Vanina, 2004), the chapter contextualises this in terms of the contemporary setting. It unpacks how a specific historical context (time) interplays with the global economy and labour’s position in it (space) in the locality of Saharanpur’s wood working industry (place).

Mobility & Migration in Pre-Colonial Craft Production

Several narrative strands run through literature on Indian craft workers; questions of identity, work, economic position, success, failure, opportunity and exploitation all feature. Whilst many accounts tend to begin with the colonial era (i.e. Roy, 1999; Kumar, 1988), the pre-colonial period also warrants attention. It has been presented, in contrast to Europe, as stagnated and unchanging (i.e. Moreland, 1929). However this is challenged. Since medieval times Saharanpur experienced several changes of control: The Delhi Sultanate (1192–1526), the Mughals (1542–1739), the Rohillas (1748-1770) and the Marathas (1789–1803). Perlin (1983) suggests that areas, such as Saharanpur, which sat at the fringes of empires and were often in flux, saw the emergence of ‘proto-capitalism’ and vibrant forms of economic development due to limited state control. However, Vanina (2004) argues that it was politically stable urban centres which were most active, driven by the concentration of craft production in cities. Although dominated by feudal patronage, she contends that there was manufacture of mass consumption items and rapid development in craft technologies.

This suggests a level of migration as artisans were drawn to localities by royal patronage. Indeed, Kumar (1988) describes weavers in Banaras as originating from Samarkhand, Kashmir and Persia. Handa and Jain (2000) suggest that Saharanpur's industry was established by migration of artisans from Kashmir after Mughal rule collapsed there in the mid-1700s. Artisans historically had a high degree of mobility and engaged in migration to areas where work or patronage was available (Kerr, 2006; Haynes & Roy, 1999). Haynes & Roy (1999) argue that craft migration during colonial and pre-colonial periods was not just about economic survival, suggesting that:

“...weavers were always mobile, always willing to pick up from regions in decline and move to those showing signs of expansion. Mobility has always been a strategy for ensuring subsistence, surviving famine, improving economic livelihoods and, in some cases, resisting efforts to control weavers' labour”.

(p. 88)

Later in the colonial era this also involved a shift in work regimes within which artisans operated as they migrated, not just between locations, but also out of home-based manufacturing and into handicraft factories (Roy, 2007). These factors all played their part in Saharanpur. Not only is the industry linked to earlier migration but the late colonial period also saw the emergence of factory working arrangements (Handa & Jain, 2000; Watt, 1903; District Gazetteer for the United Provinces, 1909). However, whilst large-scale handicraft manufacturing takes place, 'home-based' or 'cottage style' production is still prevalent. Today, too, workers use their mobility to negotiate conditions and pay. This provides a contrast to descriptions of the contemporary situation of craft communities described as fixed in a particular locality (i.e. Wilkinson-Weber, 1999, Kumar, 1988; Mohsini, 2010).

Indian Muslims, Craft Workers & Colonialism

Whilst the mobile nature of Saharanpur's craft workers provides a contrast to some representations, Muslims are employed in the craft sector in larger numbers than other groups (Harriss-White, 2002). Harriss-White proposes a degree of distinction from other groups during the pre-colonial and colonial period suggesting that “social separation from Hindus and their freedom from Hindus' distinctive social obligations may have

encouraged innovative activity” (p.13). Waheed (2006), however, points out that many Hindu artisans converted to Islam under the Mughals, bringing elements of caste identity and associated skills with them⁶⁶. For Waheed (2006) the Mughal era was a golden age of Indian craftwork “...it was only under the Britishers [that] economic policies ruined handicraft industries and forced artisans to become agricultural labourers” (p.20).

Others, however, see the decline of craft industries under colonial rule as part of a broader process of de-industrialisation and economic moves towards capitalism (Thorner, 1962), a process that Bagchi (1976) argues was constrained by British economic policy. Certainly sectors such as weaving were impacted by colonial laws. This saw markets flooded with cheap British cloth, causing many weavers to relocate to urban areas (Gooptu, 2001). Those who remained in the industry became tied to money lenders and merchants, a result of declining local markets and an increased reliance on export through middlemen (ibid). Whilst many craft workers were displaced by the arrival of large-scale industrial production and the import of mass-produced British goods, some suggest that the craft sector remained vibrant as craft workers “could gain from trade by obtaining access to imported raw materials and distant markets [...providing] new opportunities of capital accumulation, which process induced changes in technology and industrial organization” (Roy, 2007; p.963). Although forced to adapt, a majority of the population remained employed in craftwork (Roy, 2010). Experiences across craft trade were, then, not uniform but played out in different ways in various sectors (Gooptu, 2001).

In earlier work, too, Roy (1993) paints a vibrant scene, locating four sources of dynamic economic activity. Firstly, the emergence of a capitalist class from amongst craft workers. Secondly, a shift toward an engagement with products and markets that could not be replicated in industrial manufacture. Thirdly, a movement of craft workers to

⁶⁶ This forms part of an ongoing debate around ‘caste’ as a primary form of stratification among Indian Muslims. Whilst some see this as an important (Waheed, 2006; Kumar, 1988), Saberwal (2010) points out that “insofar as the dominant grid for apprehending society in India has been in terms of caste order, it was relatively easy to show the importance of castes, or caste analogues, in Muslim social organisation: this was mistaken as its central feature” (p.38).

urban centres. And fourthly, the adoption of new techniques including powered manufacture. Whilst this challenges catastrophic accounts of craft industries under colonial rule, the situation of labour and the relationship between labour and capital also changed. Haynes (2001) suggests that there are distinct similarities to ‘flexible specialisation’, a term applied to industrial development in peripheral areas of Europe. Under flexible specialisation Indian artisans adopted new technology to produce en masse, but the industries themselves retained their craft structure. This led to some artisans becoming petty capitalists, but also adaptation to niche demand and “the ability to add and drop workers quickly, without fear of strong resistance or organised trade unions” (p.172). Haynes points out that this questions the emphasis on factory production as the primary form of industrial capitalism⁶⁷, a point I have also made in the introduction of this thesis.

Roy (1999) discusses a shift away from the master-craftsman approach, in India during the late colonial era, towards that of employee (or employer)⁶⁸. He identifies a decline in the *ustad-shagird*⁶⁹ system, as production became de-skilled. This and the introduction of new technology had an impact on Saharanpur during the late colonial period. The 1905 Official Catalogue of the Indian Art Exhibition in Delhi, details how:

“Saharanpur used to enjoy a great reputation in the manufacture, in vine pattern, [of wood items] ...but though this still survives it has given place to the modern wholesale traffic... [C]ut by the machine fret-saw and exported to Europe and America by the thousand, and there accepted apparently as typical examples of Indian wood-carving. This new traffic has very nearly killed the wood-carving of Saharanpur and of one or two other neighbouring towns”.

(p.111)

Whilst there was a period of decline, changes in quality and moves towards mass production, colonialism did not lead to the collapse of the industry in Saharanpur generally. Instead, it pre-empted a change in structural arrangements of production and saw the emergence of factory-style manufacturing alongside the older cottage industry.

⁶⁷ This is an important point and one which relates to discussion in the introduction of this thesis emphasising the ways in which craft and informal industries are very much part of the modern capitalist supply chain economy.

⁶⁸ Although Roy tends to focus on a downward mobility from artisan to employee, he also suggests that some made the transition to ownership of production.

⁶⁹ Master and apprentice-based methods of training and recruitment.

Indeed, it was from the craft community that a new capitalist class emerged. Aslam Saleem, the owner of a large factory on the edge of town, highlights these factors as he narrates his family history. They started out as artisans, had been in the industry for around 150 years and were among those emerging as a 'capitalist class' (Roy, 1993) during the late colonial era. It was his 'fourth father' who began to expand from the position of craft producer, as the result of orders arriving in his workshop from British businessmen. These goods were destined for export, albeit via British intermediaries. Craft workers themselves began to engage in trade rather than being reliant on patronage relationships. Whilst some industries saw a fall in quality, the desire for 'authentic' Indian craft goods in the UK drove a campaign in the early 1900s to protect artisans from the ravages of industrialisation, a campaign that would later influence Gandhi in his use of Indian produced goods as symbolic of the resistance struggle and his focus on village-based development (Venkatesan, 2009).

The colonial period, however, was not a single block. Artisans were not isolated from global events elsewhere. The economic depression of the inter-war period in Europe and the US, for example, was felt in Indian craft working communities and resulted in increased economic insecurity (Gooptu, 2001). For Muslims craft workers in particular, the colonial era was intersected by impactful events driven by political and economic forces. The 1857 uprising had profound effects for the Muslim population. Resulting from the view of the British that Indian Muslims were central to the resistance, many saw a sudden loss of land and status (Waheed, 2006). However, there was a revival of Islamic culture throughout the latter stages of the 19th century. Various *Ulama*⁷⁰ favoured progressive policies emphasising the creation of schools, Mosques and universities⁷¹. This generated several reformist movements. These concentrated not just on strengthening Islam, but also the value of science, social welfare and better relations with the British (Muhammad, 2002)⁷².

⁷⁰ Educated scholars of Islam and Islamic law.

⁷¹ The most significant of these being the Aligarh Muslim University located in southwest UP.

⁷² Gooptu (2001) also describes an increasing focus within the *ulama* on welfare activities.

Whilst Muhammad describes such movements as forward looking, Metcalf (2007) argues that they did not look to ‘western modernity’ but rather “looked back, not west, and believed themselves to be in the company of the great Muslims of the past for whom precisely the end of false customs and the creation of religiously responsible individuals was central” (p.359-60). Although reform was driven by *Ulama* and *Ashraf*⁷³ elites, lower classes, including craftsmen, were also involved (ibid). Indeed, Gooptu (2001) places craft workers in the forefront of processes of Islamic reform and revival where: “...poorer Muslims of artisan communities and some service occupational groups seized upon the changing religious practices [...], which gradually came to provide a focus of organisation and identity” (p.261). However, the drive for reform and revival was not a consolidated movement. Reformism consisted of a variety of splintered groups as leaders jostled for status as ‘defenders of the faith’ (Metcalf, 2007). This did little to create a unified consciousness in a community already divided along lines of ‘caste’ and *biraderi*⁷⁴, north and south, Shia and Sunni, Deobandi and Barelwi⁷⁵. In the context of Saharanpur this is important given its proximity to Deoband, just 40km away. The influence of the institution on the city is substantial and Saharanpur is home to the large Jamia Mazahir Uloom madrassa, which is affiliated to Deoband. Saharanpur’s craft workers and the Deoband madrassa are deeply connected with the madrassa priding itself on having been built on donations from local farmers and artisans. Although tied up with *Ashraf* elites, the madrassa’s best known family, the Madanis, are themselves of weaver origin. Saharanpur’s proximity to Deoband has cemented firm links between the madrassa and the city’s craft community. It is very much part of the contemporary scene but also had a pivotal role in events during the colonial era and partition.

Partition: Memories through a Child’s Eyes

With the coming of partition and independence it is pertinent to turn to Muslim craft workers specifically. The complexity of these events cannot be done justice here and therefore I focus only on the fieldwork site. Saharanpur experienced dramatic change

⁷³ Name taken by those claiming descendancy from The Prophet, often used by Muslim nobility in north India.

⁷⁴ Guild type organisation, particularly relevant in artisan communities.

⁷⁵ Stands of Sunni Islam. Saharanpur lies close to Deoband and has a large Deobandi population.

in the form of inward and outward migration. The city saw one of the largest concentrations of incoming Hindu and Sikh refugees in Uttar Pradesh (Khan, 2003). Waheed (2006) suggests that the outward movement from such cities was dominated by the Muslim middle class who were not tied to land, as were the *zamindars* (landowners) or held by poverty, as many artisans and peasants were. Khan (2003), however, suggests a different picture, describing how:

“In Saharanpur, Agra and other western districts, insecure Muslim communities were selling their goods and planning to migrate to Pakistan. This affected many ordinary Muslims, not simply those members of the elite who had an ideological attachment to Pakistan. In Saharanpur, stalls could be seen in the market selling the goods of Muslims intending to depart and, in Aligarh, one observer noted that the railway station platform was crowded with the families of Muslim artisans, primarily locksmiths, who were waiting to leave the city”.

(p. 513-514)

By the 1950s the Indian government had become so concerned by the loss of skilled craft labour in Uttar Pradesh that a policy of deterrence was employed involving coercion and incentives in an attempt to convince artisans to stay and to retain their economic contribution (ibid).

These accounts, however, do not tell the full story. There are certain specificities that make Saharanpur different from many cities in North India. To engage with this I shift the narrative from historical accounts to life stories gathered during fieldwork. It was Ayesha who introduced me to Mohammad Anwar⁷⁶. She had met him whilst doing interviews and he agreed to come and meet me in the *sehan* of her home. We sat together and took tea. Mohammad Anwar’s life had been spent working in the industry. However, it was his story of partition that proved revealing. In telling this story it is appropriate to take the setting back to Mohammad Anwar’s childhood when, as a young boy of nine or ten years old, he recalled looking out from a child’s eyes on events. The city’s gullies became filled with chaos, as most families prepared themselves for departure:

⁷⁶ Name changed by request

“In the rainy season when the flood comes everything goes with it. This was just like a flood. They were like sheep and blindly went. This was the fashion at that time, everyone wanted to fly from Saharanpur. One night in 1947 all Saharanpur’s Muslims took the decision to go. They had the slogan ‘we will empty this place’. It was not one person but like a wave, everyone wanted to go without thinking. One night in particular the atmosphere was so bad. Everyone was running here and there without thinking, shouting ‘Allah-o-Akbar’ and making an agitation. That night everyone packed bags and prepared to leave Saharanpur due to fear. It was like a flood and everyone was sinking in that wave without thinking if it was good or not.

All the people packed their things and the date was fixed. But then from Deoband there came an important head from the madrasa. That was Maulana Husain⁷⁷. He was an old man. Maulana Husain came and told the people ‘please not to go’. He said that it is our country and that we are safe here. It was only Maulana of Deoband who stopped it, he is the reason people are living here today⁷⁸.

I was there as I liked Maulana very much. He was my role model and I wanted to see him. At that time he was very popular, every boy had great respect for him. I was studying in the Madrasa and Maulana where he was very famous. I was alone. I was in the middle of the Masjid in the sehan and could hear the speech easily. I was near the hauz [pond] in the masjid. Maulana was in front of me and he spoke there. I could hear everything. In the Masjid everyone took the decision not to go to Pakistan. His speech was very impressive.

We all knew about it as one day before there was an announcement and it was told that that all people should follow what he said. The announcement took place from rickshaws by mouth, there was no loud speaker. They did it by *bhambu* [cupping of hands over mouth to shout]. At that time it was very bad for the Muslims. They were running here and there and wanted to sell

⁷⁷ Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879 - 1957) was a disciple of Mehmud al-Hasan (1851-1920) who had been among the first intake of students at Deoband after the Madrasa opened. Maulana Hussain went voluntarily into prison in Malta to remain with his mentor after he was implicated in the Silk Letter Conspiracy. After returning he took up a post at Deoband and became very active in the independence movement. He was a major figure in Indian and Indian Muslim politics. Whilst it could be suggested this was about the Deoband Madrasa keeping its congregation intact, this would be a misrepresentation of a man who was deeply embedded in the independence movement. No text of the Saharanpur speech exists. There is, however, an account written by Maulana Husain, about a speech he made in Delhi in 1938. He argues that Islam is compatible with ‘composite nationalism’. He argues that “...The assumption that Islam and its adherents cannot confederate and interact with any other system is unacceptable. Although Islamic jurisdiction and sharia contains written views on several matters, there remain uncountable things that are allowed, and in which each person is free to act upon as per his own expediency. Among these are kingdoms, their ordinances and organisations, etc. [...] they [the British] do not want Muslims to participate in composite nationalism and become a united force in launching the freedom struggle that may prove the catalyst in overthrowing the British government (Husain, A.M. 1938 [2005] p.133-134 & 151-152).

⁷⁸ Whilst Maulana Madani was pro-congress, anti-partition and pro-independence it should be noted that there were many other powerful figures in Uttar Pradesh who took a different view. Syed Ahmad Khan, for example, was resolutely pro-British. For him the British “government was the best protector of [Muslim] interests and [he] shepherded many away from the Congress and from political agitation of any kind” (Robinson, 1974; p.4).

their household things. For example if one thing had the cost of 1000rs then it was selling at 5rs. Things were valueless at that time. Everyone wanted to sell. It was the people from Dehradun and Jwalapur who made this situation otherwise everyone was living here peacefully. When they came they made the atmosphere horrible as they had been beaten.

At that time the landowners were very rich. Their caste was Ghara; they were very wealthy as they had lots of land and property. Only two people had lots of land, one was the Hindu Gujjar and the second was Ghara Muslim so they never wanted to go to Pakistan. The Ghara caste decided to stay. Also the farmers and the orchard owners did not want to leave.

The wealthy Muslim person wanted to buy the things of the poor. The people of Haridwar and Dehradun were like refugees. We helped them and gave them food in our mohalla. We fixed tents on the road for them. They also went to Pakistan but in the time they were there we gave them food. They stayed for some time and then wanted to go. Before they came here people were not thinking to go to Pakistan but when people saw that other Muslims were going then they followed like sheep. But not everyone wanted to go; it was just some people who followed those outsiders.

[...] Some people came back from Pakistan who were originally from Saharanpur after partition as they did not like Pakistan. They had no bond and followed no rule so came back. They had gone there silently and never announced to the government that they were going. In the same manner they came back from there. They were not citizens of Pakistan so they could do it easily. In my *mohalla* also some people returned. There was no rule of a border so they could cross very easily. If they did not like it so they could easily come here.

Only two [factory] owners from here went to Pakistan, but in Pakistan this business is very short. After 1947 those two owners went there. They started business there. Before 1947 there wasn't this work in Pakistan. At that time in Saharanpur there were 4 factories which were the main factories in the wood carving industries in Saharanpur. Most of the owners stayed here.

This, then, provides an explanation as to why control of manufacturing and wholesale in Saharanpur remained in Muslim hands. Indeed, Aslam Saleem related how, although business ground to a halt during this period, his family opted to stay and continue running their factory. During the events of 1947 itself they took shelter with a Hindu family with whom they had a good relationship:

“They let my family stay in their home for one year. For this time the business was closed but after that my family started again. My forefather’s mentality was that he liked India. He thought it was a good place. [...] In Saharanpur the culture it is very peaceful and there is a good mentality”.

The wood carving industry survived, albeit in a changed economic and political environment. This differs from accounts of other Muslim artisan communities. Mohsini (2010), for example, describes how Delhi’s Zardozi⁷⁹ (needlework) industry survived, but saw a decline in demand for quality work as much of their customer base fled. Wilkinson-Weber (1999) describes a similar situation in Lucknow as the city’s *chikan* industry saw the “stripping away of elite consumers” (p.19). Whilst the loss of a Muslim middle class from other cities had a profound effect elsewhere, and impacted on Saharanpur and its wood industry, unusually the city did retain a portion of its middle class Muslim population. Indeed, the city was seen as something of a safe-haven during 1947 and saw an influx of Muslim refugees of various classes from other areas of the country, as well as Hindus from Pakistani Punjab.

I had heard these stories for some years prior to starting fieldwork through my old friends Mohammad Yusuf, his brother Abdul Naseer and their sister Ayesha Ansari. At the time of partition, as today, their family resided in Mussoorie. As tensions grew their grandfather was warned that they were in danger and should flee. Being aware of the perils of the journey to Pakistan the family looked to their ancestral home in Saharanpur as a safe resort. Their grandfather took his wife and young baby (their father) to the bus stand where it was agreed that for a fee they could be conveyed to Saharanpur hidden under goods. This story of Saharanpur as a safe haven is borne out by others. Mustaqim Ansari had a similar tale to tell regarding his family’s relocation to the city which established a link to Saharanpur and precipitated his own entry into the wood industry:

“Many years ago in Yamuna Nagar we had a dilai factory [metal forge]. That factory belonged to my father but suddenly partition began and my grandfather went to Pakistan. In the journey he was killed. My father’s sister was also killed in an incident. My father forgot some money in his house at Yamuna Nagar. It was 1500 rupees. He forgot as he suddenly had

⁷⁹ Associated with Muslim artisans.

to run away. Then my father's sister went in his house to take that money but those people killed her. 1500rs then is like 15 lakh rupees today.

My father and uncle came to Saharanpur from Yamuna Nagar. At that time the Yamuna River was full and they came by swimming. My uncle and father lived in the forest on the river bank of the Yamuna as they were fearful. They had no relatives or link in Saharanpur. They met some people who told them 'let's go to Saharanpur as there is a large number of Muslims there, you will be safe there'. They met in Yamuna Nagar and they told them to come as Saharanpur was safe for Muslims. Finally my father and uncle arrived here and many Muslims helped them. Some gave food and others clothes, many helped them and my father and uncle also married in Saharanpur.

In the old times people were very gentle and helpful. Now though the time has changed and no one wants to help the poor. First they were just labour. They carried bricks, material and cement. Then they went back in Ambala for work. My grandfather was killed there and my father was emotionally attached as it was the birth place of my father and grandfather. Then my father built a house in Ambala and started to live. Then again he came back to Saharanpur and we learned the woodwork in Saharanpur. My father lived in Ambala. We brothers came back in Saharanpur to learn this work. Each week he came here to watch on us as Ambala is close by".

Living in 'Hindustan'⁸⁰: Ups, Downs, Ins & Outs Since Independence

This history and the events of partition had a profound effect on the makeup of Saharanpur today. However, the intervening years have also seen a variety of economic and political changes. Whilst state-sponsored formal sector industries grew, some areas of production saw a decline. In the Kanpur textile industry, for example, demand saw a steep decline from the 1960s onwards and many workers moved into informal sector employment, some of it artisanal in nature (Joshi, 1999). Change, though, was present throughout this period. Streefkerk (1985), for example, details the increasing integration of artisans into industrial activity, not through direct employment, but via the conversion of their skills and workshops into producing goods for non-craft based sectors of the economy. In Saharanpur the industry did not so much decline but became

⁸⁰ Hindustan, meaning 'country of the Hindus' is commonly used by Muslims of Saharanpur as the common name for India. It is loaded with political meaning as it signifies a perceived separation of the states of 'Pakistan' and 'Hindustan'. It was originally used by Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Muslim League in the run up to partition as a way of signifying that there was no place for Indian Muslim's in a united (but Hindu dominated) India.

increasingly geared towards export. Anwar Saleem, one of the largest manufacturers and brother of Aslam, explained the trajectory of the family business as they moved from indirect to direct export.

“First [my grandfather] bought wood pieces and made his own work for the local market in Saharanpur. He made rolling pins for local supply. Then my grandfather met a customer from Moradabad. Slowly he started their orders; these were for export but went through that Moradabad customer. The second chance was my father’s. He got a German customer from Delhi and suddenly he started exporting to Germany. That was in 1965. Actually the importer from Germany was looking for fine work. At that time our tikai work was very famous. The German came here and saw a labourer sitting on the road. He asked about his work as it was very good and where he got it. The labourer said that ‘I am just a labourer. It is the work of Anwar Saleem and not mine’. Then he took the customer in our workshop. My father got that order as the quality of his work was the best. Nowadays the quality of the work is very bad. After that his business started to grow and we got a second order from Japan. Actually it was a big deal from Japan and we got a big order from them. After this in 1984 I separated from my father and started my business. In 1989 I started my first business for export outside India to go to Japan. Now, though, most of my work is to go to Europe”.

The rise of the Saleem family took place during a period when some found opportunity for rapid social mobility. However, this also created new class divides. These became starker with each generation. As I was interviewing Anwar Saleem, two of his sons joined us in the office. Anwar explained that he was taught to do the handwork by his father. His sons, however, had not learnt craft work and had instead obtained MBAs from Delhi.

Whilst the Saleem family gained opportunities based on initial advancement in the colonial period, others had a different experience. Mustaqim took me to meet his *Mamu* (maternal uncle), Mohammed Shahzad Ansari, a friendly man in his 60s. He welcomed me into the small workshop where his three sons and two other boys were employed as *shagrids* (apprentices). Above the workshop the family had living quarters. Between the two was a grate for air to pass. Through this Mohammad Shahzad called for tea and snacks. Their work consisted of orders outsourced from large producers. Mohammad Shahzad explained that they preferred this arrangement to working in the

factories as they can get work from several places and keep a steadier flow. Having spent eight years learning *tikkai* work he began taking work from the factories in the early 1970s. At this time there were few people in the industry and he explained that they produced a lot for domestic consumption as well as export⁸¹. Now, he said, it was different. Work came from overseas but only large factories got the orders. The small artisans, he complained, did not have knowledge or access to tools, such as the internet, so were unable to engage directly with international trade. According to Mohammad Shahzad, the period when some could transition to a local capitalist class (Roy, 1993) had now come to an end as a new socio-economic differentiation was becoming ingrained in the community.

As we sipped tea Mohammad Shahzad recalled that the export trade went through a particularly large expansion from about 1975⁸², when...

“...foreigners started to come and place orders with some artisans. As a result the industry grew quickly and many people started to learn the trade. Some artisans started to employ many workers and became Maliks. This only happened to lucky ones who were, by chance, approached by foreigners. While there were more successful artisans from the start with larger workshops, they were still artisans. It was only from this time that the gap grew and their position in the community changed. Today it is much harder as existing owners have a strong position and control access to the export markets. Now others can’t make the same transition”.

In spite of this Mohammad Shahzad’s business was good and his workshop buzzed with the incessant tapping that was ubiquitous with woodwork. He explained, however, that things had not always been so. In the early 1980s, following a downturn, he found himself pulling a rickshaw for a year. This, Mohammad Shahzad explained, was due to an influx of workers which was not matched by a growth in work, but also due to the closing of cutting machines by Rajiv Gandhi and the introduction of a tax on what had previously been tax exempt craft items. At this time people started to go out for work as there was little in Saharanpur and other cities could offer better earnings⁸³. For those

⁸¹ Whilst craft goods have become increasingly export-orientated there is now a booming furniture industry where output is mostly consumed domestically.

⁸² As described previously there was also fairly substantial export activity dating back to the colonial period.

⁸³ I return to this story of an expansion of migration activity in chapter 5. What is described here are primarily structural factors, however in chapter 5 I discuss other driving influences that interplayed with these.

who stayed things were hard and many went into other forms of labour. Although things had long since improved, the rickshaw remained sitting in a corner as a kind of memento and, he said, as an insurance policy in case hard times came again.

Prior to this period rapid expansion led to new workers arriving from outlying villages and towns. This was on a commuting basis but in some cases led to such areas becoming wood manufacturing spaces in their own right. Mehboob Ansari from the nearby town of Chilkana was among the early commuters to begin traveling into the city. Born post-independence in 1949, he began work in the industry around 1965. He had initially worked in mango orchards which his family took on rent from local landowners:

“...my father realised that wood work will be nice for us, so he decided to send me for work in this line. We were five people who went to Saharanpur for work. We did different jobs such as chilai, cutting and some machine work, each according to his wish. I learnt the work with my ustad. He was also Ansari caste and was very nice. I had more than one ustad in my training until I became perfect in the work. [After finishing my training] I worked for seven years in Saharanpur first in a factory and then in a shop. [...] In the factory there were six cutting machines, six people for chilai, some for tikai and some carpenters. In total there were about 50-55 people and four of us were from Chilkana. There were many castes in the factory. Nine or ten of us were Ansari and the rest were Teli, Kamboh and Ghara. Ansari were the greater number, Ansari people are very gentle. [When I started my own work in the shop] it was in Sakko ko Mohalla. My partner was Qureshi and we set up some cutting machines. The shop was on rent and we took three machines on rent also. Then I thought it would be good to start a line [network] here in Chilkana. It was very small-scale. Here I started training some other boys. We never showed any greediness, we never took any money as fees, we gave them their money and kept our profit in our pocket. Gradually this chain started here in Chilkana and the boys taught other boys. In this way the line [network] came into existence here. But you know after some years there were many craftsmen in Chilkana and the work was not enough so some went again to Saharanpur for work”.

Whilst some now commute into the city, Chilkana still retains local manufacturing networks. Much of this work is carried out alongside agricultural production with craftsmen moonlighting in different roles. In this sense there is a degree of contrast with Saharanpur itself where craftsmen have less access to alternative livelihoods. This

was a point that my ustad, Mohammad Arshad emphasised as being problematic. He complained that the influx of labour from rural areas drove down earnings as villagers had less expenses and other incomes meaning that they could work for lower rates than the city-based craftsmen.

Whilst growth in the size of the labour force proved a driver of change other factors, such as new technologies, policy change and communal upheavals, also interplayed here. Mohammad Shahid was an elderly artisan based in Purana Mandi. He sat in a small workshop sandwiched between showrooms close to the entrance of the market. Here he spent his days doing various odd jobs making a somewhat eccentric selection of objects which he occasionally sold. As we chatted two of his friends joined us. The three elderly men cracked jokes and chuckled at my questions, although they answered kindly and with a smile. Mohammad Shahid spent many years as a cutting machine operator and recalled how expansions in exports and the introduction of new technologies, in particular the arrival of powered large (aara) and small (aaree) cutting machines, affected the atmosphere in which he laboured:

“When I started the work with the ustad I would sometimes take some work to my home in the evening and cut the wood by aaree machine. It was hard as there was no power and I had to work by candle light but I could earn a little extra money. It was very good work at the time I started.

First of all just one araa machine came here and in that machine they cut the wood for the partitions. Many people were influenced by it as it can do the work in a short time. First of all Syyed Hasan bought the araa machine. Actually that machine was second hand as he got it from a factory that was suddenly closed. Then others thought the same. Due to the araa machine the production was increased in Saharanpur.

The carving work is by hand but if you want to make pieces then you go to the machine as it can do it quickly. Before 50 years ago we wanted to cut a piece then it took a full day. First we did the work by hand but then after some time the araa machine came here and due to this the production increased and our arree (two person saw) became useless. My hammer also disappeared at this time! I do still do not know who took it [the men laugh at this joke]!

Before the machines we could cut the wood by hand with no pressure. It was very interesting work to cut the work as while cutting we could gossip. Before 50 years ago we had lots of work and were never without. After the

machines came everything became faster and the pressure was more. For the carvers too this happened as they had the pressure of extra wood supply and many new people came into the work”.

The introduction of a degree of mechanisation changed the pace and rhythm of work. However, this was not accompanied by the alterations of work time, as embodied by a shift from agrarian cycle to clock time, which is associated with industrialisation elsewhere (Thompson, 1967; cited in De Neve *et al*, 2010). The arrival of machines in the industry did not lead to a clock time based system of work but rather to the appearance of '*bijalī ke waqt*' or 'electricity time'. Now piece rate machine workers often keep all kinds of hours, day and night, but their labouring and idling periods are controlled by the appearance and disappearance of Saharanpur's unreliable power supply.

Powered production and various ups and downs are reflective of a broader contradictory position occupied by craft workers in post-independence India. On the one hand policy favoured state-orchestrated industrialisation, and on the other there was an identification of craft products as linked with the independence struggle. Whilst the Nehruvian vision favoured the former and promoted centralised industrial planning, the craft sector remained a major part of the economy. The government provided various grants and programs aimed at supporting traditional craft production and artisan work (Venkatesan, 2009). This encouraged various producers to try to ensure that they could be identifiable as craft or artisan workers, thereby gaining access to these awards and schemes, a feature which continues today (Mohsini, 2010; Venkatesan, 2009).

For Muslim artisans there was also access to government programs. However, this was lower than that obtained by their Hindu counterparts (Ahmad, 1975; Mohsini, 2010). Whilst the number of Muslims in artisan industries is high, the level of ownership and self-employment is far lower (Harriss-White, 2002). This, coupled with economic and political disadvantages, continues to make Muslims one of the most marginalised groups in India (Sachar, 2006). Whilst Handa & Jain (2000) paint Saharanpur as relatively peaceful since independence, the city has experienced communal violence on several

occasions (Ludden, 1996). Tensions flared up during the Babri Masjid debate and its subsequent destruction in 1992 (Engineer, 1995). Recently a riot broke out during the Holi festival when colour was thrown at the city's main Jammu Masjid and in August 2014 friends informed me that a curfew had been put in place during Eid following violence over a land dispute between a Sikh *Gurdwārā* (Temple) and a nearby *Masjid*.

Communal Relations in Contemporary Saharanpur: A 'Bhut' comes to Call

Violence is a part of the city's landscape but plays out in subtle ways. Stories of *bhuts* (ghosts) are common in the city, but one recent apparition was revealing. The *bhut* took the form of a large cat which attacked people during Ramadan in the summer of 2009. The *bhut* had the power to change its shape at will, transforming into human or other animal forms. The *bhut* received wide-spread attention, even attracting media reporters to the gullies where it had appeared. Television news reports from the time tell of a controversial 'tantric baba'⁸⁴ coming to the city claiming there were in fact forty ghost cats that were now residing in the body of a young girl. She was forced to 'vomit' these apparitions out, after which they were buried and the city freed of the scourge (Headlines Today; 2009). Whilst the media presented the infestation as threatening all communities, it was the Muslim neighbourhoods that were primarily affected. This, along with the fact that the spirit, or spirits, appeared during Ramadan, led to rumours that the *bhut* had been conjured up by Hindus intent on disrupting the holy month.

Whilst it is tempting to consider such events only in the local or national context, communal tensions do not exist independently of global connections. The Indian media and sections of the political elite often make a great deal of foreign influences in the Muslim community, particularly when discussing terrorism or 'Islamification'. These conflicts are not just affected by political or religious agendas, but also by economic and global processes. Control of certain industries (Wilkinson, 2006) or changing wealth dynamics, such as income generated through Gulf migration (Osella & Osella, 2007) can also form areas of friction. Chatterjee (2009) suggests that neoliberal globalisation and

⁸⁴ In this case of Muslim Sufi affinity.

its associated restructurings can have profound effects on communal tensions in urban spaces. Based on work following the 2002 riots in Ahmedabad she suggests that:

“...this violence was not a result of ‘inward-looking’ ethnocentric nostalgia of a place resisting globalisation, nor was it a socio-psychological aberration. The global is locally deployed in meaningful ways to impact on inter-community life. [...] Neoliberal industrial restructuring and urban renewal are global–local strategies that accumulate for the local and the global elite by dispossessing the poor in general and minority ethnic poor in particular. Disposessions contribute directly or indirectly to conflict”.

(p. 156)

Liberalisation & Craftwork in Saharanpur: Another kind of ‘Bhut’?

The impact of liberalising economic reforms is contested. Some suggest success through generating economic growth and alleviating poverty via trickledown (Bhagwati, 1993), others argue this ignores the micro economic impact (Patnaik, 1995) and that state programs remain the prime contributor to poverty alleviation (Byers, 1998). Craft industries that expanded have seen the recruitment of workers drawn from groups beyond earlier confines of caste, ethnicity or gender. Agra’s footwear industry, for example, has employed increasing numbers of female workers beyond the traditional *Jatav* leatherworking caste, the majority being from forward caste groups (Knorringa, 1999). With leather work seen as polluting to higher caste Hindus this was justified: “even though for them a job in ‘leather’ would appear to be demeaning, at least it can be portrayed to the outside world as a regular job in a modern factory (ibid, p.325)”. De Neve (2005) describes the successful entry of non-weaving castes into the textile manufacturing industry in Tamil Nadu. There is some evidence for improved mobility in expanding artisan industries. However, Scrase (2003), citing UN figures, suggests a three decade decline in artisan forms of labour of 30%, “with many artisans joining the ranks of casual wage labourers and the informal economy” (p.449). Stories of decline often identify increased competition as a primary factor and Saharanpur now experiences substantial competition from elsewhere in Asia (Cunningham et al, 2005).

Ethnographies from other areas of the world describe the appropriation of craftwork by mass production factories in other parts of the world. Tice (1995), for example, describes how Kuna craftwork from Panama is copied and mass produced in China, only to be sold back to markets in Central America at a cost that undercuts local products. Stoller (2008) illuminates even more complex circuits where Ghanaian silk *Kente* cloth⁸⁵ is replicated in cheap cotton by Asian-run factories in New York. This was copied again by producers back in Ghana who had previously worked in expensive silk. The Ghanaian producers in turn outsourced production to Benin and Côte d'Ivoire to drive down costs. Such circuits and shifts towards mass production and competition from other parts of the world intermingle with the declining status of artisan work in India to push people into other occupations (Qureshi 1990; Scrase 2003). This may be tied up with the marginalisation of Muslims (Mohsini, 2010) but changing perceptions among offspring of artisans can also be a factor. Quoting a young *Chamar*⁸⁶ man, Jeffrey et al (2005) explain: "I am educated and so I feel that I should do pen work, even if it means only earning 40 or 50 rupees a day [...] Many educated *Chamar* young men sought to escape a subordinate status through detaching themselves from all types of hand work" (p.29).

These descriptions have varying degrees of relevance in Saharanpur. Craft workers, particularly those of the older generation, often complained of decline⁸⁷, a story to which various reasons are ascribed:

"Exports are down due to recession in US and Europe, as a result many artisans have left Saharanpur to find work in other parts. Buying agents from Delhi are buying wood items from elsewhere. As the industry is less clustered wood is being sold outside UP from here, meaning that prices are up and availability down. There is also a lot of competition from foreign companies particularly in China, Korea and Pakistan".

(Wholesaler in Purana Mandi)

⁸⁵ Traditional patterned silk clothing material.

⁸⁶ Leatherworking caste. As leather is seen as polluting to high caste Hindus their status is particularly low.

⁸⁷ This ties with a sense of decline and loss of power more generally (Mohsini, 2010; Metcalf, 2007). As Gooptu (2001) describes: "...a growing sense of insecurity and dislocation, and often an actual or dreaded loss of their status as independent artisans [meant craft workers...] increasingly drew upon the idea of Muslim decline and came to construct and imagine their past in terms of a proud and idealised heritage" (p.260). Notions of a once great past are not exclusive to Indian Muslims but also feature more broadly in discourses regarding a 'bygone age' which perpetuate across the Muslim world. Indeed, the various reformist movements are very much focused on the recovery of a 'pristine Islam' based on notions of the era of The Prophet (Ali, 2003).

In spite of this, the scale of the industry and the fact that it continues to attract young male recruits (Table 3.1) indicates that it is still growing, at least in terms of the labour force. The industry has not seen the kind of decline in status described by Mohsini (2010) or Jeffery (2005). It is unlike those craft industries where only a few elderly artisans remain (Kumar, 1988) or where many have been forced into unskilled informal jobs (Scrase, 2003). Whilst this gives an indication that the industry is not declining, it also has an effect upon the types of relationships and forms of socialisation that take place as a result of the large number of young male workers within it. However, new recruits often become wage labourers rather than artisans, in the classic sense, albeit within the shroud of piece rate work.

Table 2.1 Age Demographics among Muslim Workers in Saharanpur's Wood Industry (all sectors and trades)⁸⁸

Age	% Men	% Women
<18 ⁸⁹	2	5
18-24	31	18
25-34	38	10
35-44	15	25
45-54	9	20
55-64	3	9
65+	1	2.7
Don't Know	0	4
Total % (of 416 respondents)	100	100

Source: Fieldwork

Economic reform and increasing competition have impacted and are often raised as issues by wholesalers, exporters and manufacturers. Old routes of trade dating back to colonial times, and beyond, are reconstituted as new supply chains open up and others move elsewhere seeking cheaper products. Yet we know that it is not just mobility of capital but also labour that is tied with liberalisation. The period since the 1980s has

⁸⁸ 316 men & 100 women (data from women gathered in conjunction with interviews by Ayesha).

⁸⁹ These data are unlikely to be representative as owners were often not happy for us to talk to this group.

seen a tremendous increase in the mobility of workers from the city, leading one artisan in Kathakheri to bemoan:

“This was golden work but now it is dust. Wood is expensive and products sell at a lower price. The workers who could do good work have now gone outside to work, some to the Gulf. Here they earn just 6000rs but there they earn 12000rs. Now it is getting very hard to find labour to work with me”.

...and another complaining that upon returning from the Gulf:

“...they don't want to work in this industry as they consider the wages to be too low and look instead to go back outside. They don't invest in this industry either, but just buy property and try to go abroad again”.

Returning workers themselves had a variety of views on their experiences and the remittances they send back have both beneficial and disruptive effects⁹⁰.

In spite of this the largest impacts have not always resulted from liberalisation but from government policy. Two recent events were emphasised by manufacturers and artisans. The first was a ban on sawmills. This led to the main trade bodies organising city-wide protests and a period of *bandh* (strike). The second was the implementation of value-added tax on sections of the industry that were reclassified from handicraft, which is tax exempt, to manufactured goods. Again this led to protests organised by trade associations, however the reclassification was not applied to all producers:

“We work hard but the government put a 13.5% VAT tax on wood items. We started the association to oppose this but so far it has not done anything. For handicraft there is no tax but I am classified as a furniture producer so have to pay. Some exporters manage to get classified as handicraft but I do not know how they do it”.

Wholesaler in Purana Mandi

This is not just a vague story of agitation against taxes and laws, but is revealing of power structures within the industry. These agitations were not organised by workers themselves, but rather by an elite group of wholesalers, exporters, artisans and manufacturers who form the membership of the two main trade associations. However,

⁹⁰ This only reflects a small part of the story of Gulf migration. I return to this in chapter 10.

this class was not formed from an *Ashraf*⁹¹-dominated elite⁹² but from a mixed *biraderi* (caste/community) group many of whom had origins within the craft working community but were descendants of those who emerged as a petty capitalist class as export markets opened up.

Stratification & Biraderi: A Mixed Scene

Mines (1972) argues that Muslim *biraderis* are more fluid than Hindu castes. However, there are various complexities. Anwar (1995) identifies *biraderi* as important in the construction of networks of migration between Pakistan and the UK. Here *biraderi* provides a support network and a degree of obligation through kin-like ties. *Biraderi*-based divisions can be formulated around three primary groupings. *Ashraf* (elites claiming lineage from the disciples of The Prophet), *Ajlaf* (converts from mid-ranking Hindu castes) and *Arzal* (*dalit* converts). Many reformist movements emphasise the egalitarian nature of Islam as opposed to *biraderi*. However, the emergence of political and representative organisations claiming to be the voice of *dalit* Muslims illustrates real and perceived inequalities (see: Ahmad, 2003; Ansari, 2009; Wright, 1997). Khalidi (2004) suggests that the most successful Muslims are from *biraderis* that have long been economically dominant. Khalidi goes on to point out that other groups have become more mobile. However, categories of *Ashraf*, *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* are in flux. Ahmed (1973) details how Sheikh Siddiques in Allahabad claimed *ashraf* lineage in spite of descending from *Kayastha* Hindus. Likewise, Ansaris have an *ashraf* claim that is challenged (Rai, 2013). During fieldwork, the *Telis* were renaming themselves. Appeals were circulated advising that the regal sounding '*Malik*' should be used. The re-defining of caste/*biraderi* identity has been characterised as *ashrafization* and runs parallel to *sanskritization* among Hindus, involving a reconfiguring of ritual and rules to reflect actual or attempted social mobility (Metcalf, 1999). This plays out in complex ways. Simpson (2006), for example, describes how Gujarati shipyard masters of the *Bhadala*

⁹¹ High caste/*biraderi* grouping.

⁹² Whilst higher *biraderi* groups such as Muslim Rajput (13%) and Pathans (3%) were present in the export and wholesale levels of the industry, Teli/Maliks (26%) and Ansaris (10%) retained a strong presence (Source: Fieldwork).

caste used reformist Islam to challenge the influence of *Saiyeds*⁹³ in order to reinforce a newly established social position and gain greater control over their labour force.

Many accounts of Muslim craft industries describe *biraderi*⁹⁴ as being key to the constitution of labour forces. Mehta (1997), for example, describes an *Ansari*⁹⁵ weaving community in *Barabanki* (Uttar Pradesh) who work within the traditional confines of the caste group. Goodfriend (1983) (cited in Ruthven, 2008) suggests that: “Historically, *biraderis* with occupational specialisations also functioned as guilds, regulating access to training, transmission of trade secrets, skills and employment” (p.136). The demographic makeup of the labour force in Saharanpur, however, does not fit these descriptions of homogenous craft communities (Table 3.2).

Table 2.2 Caste Demographics among Muslim Workers in Saharanpur’s Wood Industry (all sectors and trades)

Caste	% Worker/Artisan
Ansari	25.7
Faqir	2.4
Pathan	6
Rajput (Muslim)	2.2
Siddique/Sheikh Siddique	3
Teli/Malik	31
No Caste Affiliation/ Don’t Know	2.7
Other	28.1
Total (of 416 respondents)	100

Source: Fieldwork

The largest *biraderi* groups were Teli/Malik⁹⁶ and Ansari. Telis were originally oil pressers and Ansaris weavers so their strong presence in the industry is not associated

⁹³ Sainly figures claiming genealogy from The Prophet. Occupy the highest (Ashraf) stratum of society.

⁹⁴ Caste or community.

⁹⁵ The Ansari caste has two roots. One, claiming descendance from the Ansar of Medina, and the other being weavers who converted to Islam during Mughal rule. In U.P. the latter form the vast majority.

⁹⁶ There is a process currently under way among Telis to redefine their caste group as Malik. This campaign extends throughout India and Pakistan and is part of an attempt to improve the status of Telis as a caste.

with ‘traditional’ trades. Neither do they exclusively occupy one skillset (i.e. carving, buffing or brass work). Numerous other *biraderis* are engaged, and during surveys 65⁹⁷ *biraderi* names were given. This is not to suggest that *biraderi* is absent. Kinship connections matter. Cross-*biraderi* marriage is rare and discouraged. In considering the labour environment, however, it is important to contextualise the setting in terms beyond *biraderi* and kinship. Various influxes of *biraderi* groups have taken place over the years. As one craft worker described regarding the large number of Telis:

“[Before partition] the oil extraction industry was down and many Telis moved into this [wood]work as it was then booming. They worked as labourers but over the years some have become owners and exporters. The change of caste name to Malik was not a big thing, these people just did not want to be called Teli anymore. They did it to show their wealth as these people did not want to be associated with the caste”.

Partition, too, had an effect. With Saharanpur seen as a safe haven, the refugee population and post-partition growth led to many entering the profession irrespective of *biraderi*.

In spite of the mixed nature of Saharanpur’s workforce, perceptions of certain ‘qualities’ pertaining to *biraderi* remain:

“The character of the Ansari is to be helpful and honest. They want to progress but cannot. If an Ansari discusses a business with someone of another caste then that person will say the business idea is stupid but later he will take the idea and do it himself so the Ansari loses”.

(Elderly craft worker in Chilkana)

Where cross-*biraderi* marriages do occur, there are consequences. One friend, for example, had a cousin standing for local election. I attended a party he organised for the neighbourhood. Food was served in three sittings. Large numbers of guests enjoyed his hospitality for which he bore substantial cost. His cousin, however, told me that he would not be elected as his cross-*biraderi* marriage had damaged his reputation. Yet in spite of the continued importance of *biraderi* there was no objection to training

⁹⁷ Some of these actually represent sub-divisions of the same *biraderi*.

apprentices, doing business or employing workers. Many of the wood shops and gullies contained working groups who were not affiliated to one *biraderi*. This was further impacted by the reformist drive of the Deoband Madrassa and the *Tabligh Jamaat*⁹⁸ which acted to reinforce concepts of post-biraderi society based within notions of Islamic brotherhood.

Whilst this provides a different account from some other contributions (i.e. Mann, 1992), there remains a degree of tension between notions of egalitarian brotherhood and other identities. Even Mustaqim's son, Javid, at the age of eighteen was aware of these contradictions:

"Our parents tell us that we should marry in our own caste. This is very strict for every child in Muslim society. But I do not think that this should be so as our religion does not say this. I don't think this is such a big thing in today's society. In Saudi if someone loves a girl so they can marry that girl. There is no caste system there and they don't worry about Ansari or Teli.

Actually the caste system is made by society and the society. Some castes believe they are powerful but others believe they are gentle. Our caste is the simplest caste. Allah sent The Prophet. He had great power and knew who was Hindu or Muslim. If you were in front of The Prophet he could tell if you are Christian or Hindu. But he never told us about caste, so how can we believe in this. It is my wish that there should be no caste system as all men are equal in the eyes of Allah. God has not made this but it is only humans who have made this and now they proudly say: 'oh we are khan' or 'we are Ansari' but this is a very wrong thing for our society".

Conclusion

This recent and older history represents a complex ensemble within which to think about the ways in which production, capitalism and the supply chain are embedded within a Muslim craft working community in which both communal and individual histories have shaped the economic and social environment. Saharanpur provides some challenges to the 'standard story' of artisanal decline and Muslim marginalisation. It forms a complex community in which varieties of power and influence are exerted.

⁹⁸ I return to this in chapter 6.

Saharanpur's craft community has adapted, re-configured and diversified in various ways in order to cope with the shifting political and economic terrain. Muslims in the city are not mere victims of their marginalised socio-economic position but are versatile, diverse and connected. Indeed, whilst not denying the persisting difficulties they face, the very identity upon which marginalisation is based also opens up access to particular networks and connections unavailable to their Hindu counterparts. This chapter, then, has illustrated the importance of considering such connections in historicised, as well as spatial and local contexts. Beginning with the historical setting, in an ethnographic sense, creates an additional challenge. Saharanpur or, in this case, the workers of its industry, are not as peripheral to complex global connections as it may at first appear. Instead, the following chapters aim to resituate the locality at the centre of complex network of connections, beginning with that of the supply chain.



Showrooms & Wholesalers at the entrance of Purana Mandi

Chapter Three

From Exporter to Homeworker: Locating Lives in the Supply Chain



Linkages and Networks: from a wood turner in a small back street workshop to the Expo Mart near Delhi

In early 2012 I journeyed to Greater Noida, an isolated outlier of Delhi. Travelling on the metro to the end of the line I took a rickshaw for the remaining 25km, through sprawling low-level developments, to the expansive Expo Mart centre which was hosting the Indian Handicrafts and Gifts Fair. Having come directly from the woodworking gullies, the centre was a scene change. Smartly dressed Arabs, Asians and Westerners assembled to obtain samples and place orders for multinational companies and smaller businesses. Having been unable to reach my contact, Aslam Saleem, I arrived without a pass. At the first entrance I was confronted and turned away. At the second I walked alongside a group of European buyers and passed unchallenged. It took time wandering around sections of the large tented exhibition hall which was erected outside the main building, before I came upon Aslam's stand. I had first met Aslam in the courtyard of his factory, set among villages around Saharanpur, two months previously. Now he was busy meeting buyers but motioned me to sit in the corner of his stand while he discussed orders with two women representing a French firm.

The Expo Mart in Greater Noida, which provides an intersection for craft industries and international buyers, is the starting point for this chapter. I explore the supply chain's layers of 'putting out', subcontracting and the connections therein. Beginning with exporters, wholesalers and large-scale factories, the chapter descends through smaller workshops to individual craftspeople and homeworkers. Throughout, two sets of connections are given attention: Connections between people and connections constituted around money. Many of these areas are expanded on in later chapters. However, the purpose here is to provide a snapshot of both the supply chain and the lives, subjectivities and bonds therein. Here I follow Tsing (2009) in arguing that supply chains allow anthropologists to scrutinise, not just global integration, which she terms 'thinking big', but also 'diverse niches', non-homogeneity and the lack of singularity within global capitalism. This is not a supply chain filled with easily identifiable actors who embody either oppressive regimes or oppositional resistance. Instead, actors inhabit liminal spaces fraught with contradictions and tensions. Manufacturers and exporters occupy positions of power but also, as Muslims, experience marginalisation (Galonner, 2012) and play out obligations to the community (Osella & Osella, 2009); *thēkēdārs*⁹⁹ sit in an uneasy locality between workers and owners, their connections to labour overlapping with friendship, kin and other affiliations; artisans and workers may double as *thēkēdārs*, playing out a duality of roles; petty manufacturers emerge precariously from the labour force only to fall back again as tenuous ventures fold under a burden of credit. It is to these 'frictions' (Tsing, 2005) that this chapter gives particular attention, with the aim of recognising that:

"...supply chains [...] team with politically ambiguous, liminal figures, caught within the contradictions between varied forms of hierarchy and exclusion. [It is appropriate therefore] to pay attention to these figures, rather than rejecting them as flawed protagonists. They can help us imagine forms of globally interconnected diversity: a capitalism that is big yet unpredictably heterogeneous"

(Tsing, 2009; p.154)

⁹⁹ Contractors

The Local Tip of the Supply Chain: Karkanadars, Exporters & Wholesalers

Aslam Saleem, whose family history I have discussed in the previous chapter, was one of the few factory owners with whom I was able to build an informal relationship. I ate at his house, obtained a degree of access to his factory and accompanied him on business to Delhi. Prior to meeting him I had met his brother at his factory in central Saharanpur. Aslam, however, chose not to set up business in the city, instead taking a gamble on establishing a complex near an outlying village:

“When I came here first, there were big problems and the city exporters laughed at me and said: ‘Why is he going out of the city? It will be very difficult’. I arranged a few good workers here. There were very poor workers near here in the villages. I talked with them and said: ‘I will teach you and give you salary and payment’. Some workers were not happy but some came. Each day I taught the workers even the basic thing like what is a hammer and nail. For one year I just taught and then we started. After one year of working I had one expert worker for every ten helpers. Now it is better and every person is learning”.

Aslam exported all over the world. Lorries, often parked outside the factory, were loaded with shipping containers ready to be filled. The factory itself was arranged on a production line basis with raw wood entering at one end and each item being manufactured stage by stage. The size was impressive with the sprawling site employing some 600 staff and having a large degree of mechanisation, although craft stages remained handwork-based. Aslam retained most work on site and did little ‘putting out’, although he used contractors, explaining that:

“My items are very specific and technical. If some outside person comes and I give him the items to make then he cannot make easily according to the requirement of my buyer. I keep permanent contractors as sometimes I teach them. The buyer teaches me all the aspects of design, colour and packing. I explain this every time to the worker. If I give the work to a new contractor then he cannot do it easily”.

Manufacturers use systems of putting out to varying degrees, with some outsourcing all work. It is not uncommon for factory owners, wholesalers and exporters to complain about a shortage of labour in the city with many utilising advance payments to attract and retain labour. As a manufacturer in Purana Mandi explains:

"It is difficult to get, keep and find labour. Workers leave and don't come back even if they have an advance they just go away and don't repay. They think about themselves and not the owner's loss. There are plenty of orders but I cannot fill them because of lack of labour. This is made worse because of new manufacturers coming in who just do whatever to get orders and sell at low prices. This is driving down rates. Also competition from China has forced a cut. Because of this we cannot increase wages for workers and so they go elsewhere. They go all over India but also outside to Saudi. The problem is always there but the worst time is after Eid. There is a saying in Saharanpur "Eid doesn't finish as long as I have money in my pocket". Workers take the advance given for Eid and whatever they have saved and don't come back until it is gone. I have 3 workers who left for Eid and have not come back. They have not gone far but just sit here in Saharanpur and do not return to the workshop. They just do nothing".

Aslam, however, is keen to emphasise that this is not a problem for him, contextualising this in moral and religious terms:

"...for me it is not difficult [to obtain labour] as Allah has given me this gift. Allah is always happy and according to my factory need labour comes. This is because I give the facilities and do not give any bad words. Every worker gets full respect and the jobs are not hard. Every time we give a pay rise according to the cost and inflation. Working in my factory is the same as home".

Aslam's notion of factory work being just like home work is not coincidental. There are many aspects of the craft or 'cottage industry' sector that factories attempt to internalise (see also: Breman, 1999) in order to recruit, maintain and control labour. As later examples in this chapter show, this may involve paying piece rate or advances, using *thēkēdārs* and other forms of flexibility. This is not just about retaining labour but also creates a flexible workforce that can be adjusted according to demand.

As with many factories in Saharanpur, Aslam's workforce is fragmented on religious lines. Administrative roles are mostly occupied by Hindus. Lower castes (mostly *Chamars*) provide unskilled labour, but craft-based production is almost entirely Muslim. Aslam Saleem gave his view on why this is the case:

"...Hindus like to make a lot of money. Muslims are satisfied with small money, with the whole family working in the home. For them this is enough.

But for Hindus after qualifying they want more, Muslims have lower qualifications. This means that the Hindu wants a good job, like an official or management job. Due to this it is mostly Muslims going in the carving line. In India this is the problem that the Muslim is in the poor family but the handicraft work is easy for them to start. They can learn in 3-4 years and then they start”.

There is, however, a degree of protection of certain trades. Muslim craftsmen, for example, rarely train Hindu apprentices. Aside from some Hindu machine operators the only areas of the production line where Muslim and Hindus work together is finishing work, such as sanding and varnishing, and general labour, such as loading and packing. Finishing work is often, although not entirely, undertaken by women. Both Muslim and Chamar women are engaged, sharing common workspace¹⁰⁰. Although workers travel from surrounding villages little labour comes from far away, making this an industry embedded in a specific place¹⁰¹.

Whilst Aslam puts out only a small amount of work, others primarily sub-contract. This is common in the old wood market of Purana Mandi where the entrance is dominated by numerous wholesalers who often have no in-house production. A short distance away, in the neighbourhood of Ali Ki Chungi, is Naaz Handicrafts, owned by Sabir Ali Khan. As with many exporters, the production is geared towards putting out. I initially met Sabir Ali Khan’s daughter through a friend in nearby Mussoorie, where she worked in an international school. It was some time later that I made my way to his premises. Mr Khan’s factory consisted of a large concrete building, with the company name in raised orange lettering on the frontage. The factory itself adjoined directly to his house. I knocked on the door and was shown through to his office containing a large desk and walls covered with photos of meetings with various dignitaries. There were also membership plaques for the IIA¹⁰² and other organisations.

¹⁰⁰ I return to this in the next chapter.

¹⁰¹ Less than 1% are migrants, although 16% commute from villages travelling an average distance of 10km (Source: Fieldwork)

¹⁰² Indian Industries Association

Mr Khan himself was modestly dressed in a simple overcoat. He showed me around. His workshop was large but mostly contained completed stock, and relatively few workers. The staff he employed directly were engaged only in painting and polishing. Even here regular staff were few with more being brought in on contracts. All other stages of production were put out. Mr Khan explains his reasoning for this:

“We are not like the companies, we are the karkhanas¹⁰³. There is a different system between the company and the karkhana. This is a contract basis system. It has been here from the earliest days of the industry. Mostly workers sit in their houses or their own shops, which they hire. They pick up the goods from us and make the work there. Contract system means piece rate. In the past most items were common items so they fixed the rate according to these items. For some piece the carpenter will, say, get 2rs, the carver 3rs and the inlayer 2rs. Accordingly we calculate weekly payments. They work from Saturday to Thursday as the Fridays are off. We are Muslim so go for prayers in the Masjid on this day. We pay the piece rate calculation on the Thursday. We have some employees but only for packing and polishing.

[In this system] the worker is happy and I am happy. If I employ workers then, due to lack of education, they will work slowly. They will not think that it is their duty to give the full work for 7-8 hours. If I make employment permanent then he will work slowly, this is the reason for the cottage industry. This is also because it is art work. Suppose I say ‘this is one box’. To make it takes 20 minutes. If I say ‘okay you do it on permanent employment’ then it will take minimum 30 minutes. On the contract basis both are happy. Rates are fixed mutually. If I make some new item then I call the worker and ask him how much he wants. He will calculate it saying ‘if it is on time then I will take 2 days and it will be 500rs’. I say ‘no this is costly’ and request less. After all the bargaining then he will say okay 350rs is fine. So suppose there are 100 pieces then I give him 35,000rs”.

Wholesalers and larger factory owners in the woodworking industry, such as Mr Khan, are themselves Muslim (90%)¹⁰⁴, with only a few Hindus and Sikhs present. This provides a contrast to other Indian craft industries where control of export and wholesale has often been lost. For example, Muslims in the *Zari Zardosi*¹⁰⁵ trade in Bareilly, who also

¹⁰³ Hindi word for factory or workshop. Here it is used as differentiated from ‘companies’ due to the putting out of production.

¹⁰⁴ Source: Fieldwork

¹⁰⁵ Fine embroidery work.

constitute the vast majority of the labour force, have little presence in wholesale and export (Unni & Scaria, 2009)¹⁰⁶. As per the previous chapter, this is partly tied with the city's history. However, Wilkinson (2006) (citing Kumar, 1988), proposes two reasons for the (re)emergence of Muslim wholesalers and exporters in some craft industries, suggesting:

“[Firstly], because the new Muslim entrepreneurs are themselves skilled craftsmen, they do not have to employ extra staff (as do the Hindu merchants) to deal with their contract craftsmen and perform quality checks on the goods they buy. [Secondly], research conducted by Nita Kumar in Varanasi suggests that it is easier for craftsmen to complain about arbitrary deductions by the wholesaler when they are both of the same religion, which leads to some Muslim craftsmen preferring to work for their co-religionists¹⁰⁷”

(p. 29-30)

Unlike Kumar's example, however, Muslim control over export and wholesale has long been the case in Saharanpur. It is perhaps appropriate to look back to the previous chapter and Saharanpur's experience at partition where, in contrast to other cities, the Muslim population survived relatively intact. This is critical, not just in defining who controls certain areas of the industry, but also in forming an understanding around the constitution of labour relations.

Whilst both Aslam Saleem and Mr Khan are keen to emphasise good relations with workers, even going so far as to express a sense of duty to them, some manufacturers see things differently. I was introduced to Mohammad Alif through a mutual contact. His workshop consisted of a mid-size subcontracting unit employing around 25 staff. He was quick to retort to my initial question asking him to describe his business. His lengthy answer was often expressed in angry tones as he iterated his position as a second level producer with no direct access to export markets:

“There was a worker who was a liar! He told me he was going on leave but he changed factory. [...] You will write that they [the workers] are poor and about their misery. You will write that we are rude and exploit workers! We

¹⁰⁶ Artisan trades dominated by low caste Hindu labour, such as Jatavs in Agra's footwear industry (Knorringa, 1999), experience similar relations with Punjabi wholesalers and exporters. Indeed, it is primarily those of Punjabi origin who control the Zari-Zardosi industry in Bareilly.

¹⁰⁷ Wilkinson's article places such uneven relations and the struggle for control of the profitable export and wholesale markets in Indian craft industries as one of the reasons for communal conflict.

do not exploit workers! I know you'll write that we are monsters, that we drink the blood of workers. Can you tell me one answer? When we are honest to labour and pay on time but they never fulfil orders, is it the owner's mistake? Please write that labour are backwards due to this weak point, it is not the owners' mistake! If workers have money in their pockets they never come in the factory, they only stay home. Only when the money finishes will you see them. If you look in Saharanpur you'll see that the owner has also become labour, due to the laziness of workers. They never work properly, most disappear without permission. [...] 1 ½ years ago I had a carpenter who worked in my factory for years. He took 1 lakh¹⁰⁸ rupees in various stages and ran away. He earned lakhs of rupees from my factory, he would say that there was illness and problems and then he took the advances.

Can you tell me where our problem will go? No one can see our problems. We are middlemen, our customers never pay on time but the worker always shouts for money. Can you tell me where I can go to complain, no one wants to hear our problem. Who will think about us? You can see my car and two-wheelers but you will never see my problem. You never think from where I can get the petrol if I have no money or my business is going down. We may get progress if we are united. Then we can find a fine result for both parties. The worker never thinks about the owner's loss. It may be that their laziness may make my order cancelled but they never think about this. If they want leave then they take some rest in their home. If they have any emergency or accident then they come here asking for money. After all this any man can get tired and because of this the owner becomes rude and never supports his workers".

Mohammad Alif presents an image of labour relations much more loaded with friction than that narrated by many other manufacturers and exporters whom I met. However, the tensions of negotiating deferred payment are a constant presence for various intermediaries in the city. This is particularly emphasised in Mohammad Alif's narrative, as being associated with his position as a 'middleman'. It is a commonly expressed concern for those who run sub-contracting units of various sizes, who themselves occupy a precarious position and often fold under the strain of maintaining both labour and orders. In addition, it is a viewpoint that is very much shared with another 'middleman', the *thēkēdār*. Here, too, the role is one of intermediary between labour

¹⁰⁸ 100,000rs

and exporter. Unlike Mohammad Alif, however, *thēkēdārs* do not own a production facility and often have much more informal relationships with their workers.

Thēkēdārs: Villains and/or Heroes of the Supply Chain

The problem is that the worker sometimes runs away from the work and also take holidays without permission. Due to this I have great tension as I know the worker is taking holidays with no reason so my order may be delayed or cancelled.

(Shamshad, a *thēkēdār* in Purana Mandi)

Of all the characters in global supply chains, perhaps the most vilified, yet least understood are the labour contractors. By many accounts they are guilty of perpetrating contemporary slavery (Bales, 1999), child labour (Phillips et al, 2011), or being complicit in driving down wages (Mezzadri, 2008). Whilst I do not contest these assertions, ethnographic work has revealed a more contradictory character (De Neve, 2014). In Saharanpur, the position of many *thēkēdārs* is highly unstable with a great deal of fluidity between contracting and labouring roles. At times, some even occupy both the role of contractor and labour simultaneously. Thinking back to discussion in the introduction of this thesis regarding the problematic nature of defined class positions, both in the informal sector and in the Indian economy as a whole, the situation of *thēkēdārs* and of petty producers in Saharanpur illustrates just how fluid and ambiguous these roles can be. This is a very different conception of the contractor from some other recent accounts where, in an Indian steel plant for example, “...the working world of contract labourers [...] is differentiated from that of its regular workforce [which represents] distinct kinds of people and are now best seen as distinct social classes” (Parry, 2013; p.348).

Thēkēdārs in Indian industries are nothing new, being prolific during colonial and post-colonial eras as well as the current post-liberalisation economy (Sen, 2002; Roy, 2008). As is the case today, the contractor’s role over history was fluid and responded to shifting demands. Relationships with workers and employers were varied across industries with this rarely defined by the formality or informality of the sector

(Chandavarkar et al, 2004). The role of contractors have an origin predating the colonial period, rooted in more 'traditional' forms of authority where a village headman may be transformed into an industrial foreman (Roy, 2008). For some contributors the authority of the middleman, or *sardar*, is "derived from a pre-capitalist culture with a strong emphasis on religion, community, kinship, language and other, similar loyalties" (Chakrabarty, 2000[1989]; p.112). In this way the contractor ensures work is completed by using existing obligations. Akhtar (2011), for example, draws on Pakistan's construction sector to suggest that the relationship between workers and contractors is one based on older conceptions of patronage, this having been co-opted in the maintenance and control of a workforce suited to the demands of flexible accumulation.

However, the contractor needs more than primordial networks alone. De Neve (2014) emphasises the role that skill and respect, gained while working at lower levels of Tirupur's (Tamil Nadu) textile industry, plays in contractor/worker relations. Successful contractors are able to build on the trust and obligation that has been created whilst working side by side with others as labour. For De Neve, this continues as an important means of retaining workers when individuals make the step up to contractor. This is reinforced by articulations of alternative forms of obligation such as the use of 'narratives of friendship' to maintain loyalty among workers, an exercise in which contractors are not always successful¹⁰⁹. Throughout this literature, and in spite of these ambiguities, contractors are important in ensuring that informal and flexible labour required by global supply chains, is available. Saharanpur's *thēkēdārs*, then, can be seen as exploitative, hardnosed entrepreneurs who bridge between capital and labour, or as protectors of a labour force to whom they owe an allegiance and whose trust is a requirement of their control (Roy, 2008). Although this duality of roles is still present (ibid), the *thēkēdār* is not historically static. As Mezzadri (2008) points out: "...the projection of Indian social structures in the global sphere of production transforms such structures and provides them with new regulatory roles within the neo-liberal global capitalist architecture" (p. 603). Here I argue that *thēkēdārs* occupy a particularly ambiguous and highly precarious position in which they act both to bind workers to

¹⁰⁹ I return to this in the context of friendship in chapter 4.

them through various obligations and simultaneously are themselves bound in specific ways. Yet the *thēkēdār* forms a critical juncture in the supply chain between owners and workers.

Amongst the numerous factories I visited during fieldwork there wasn't a homogeneity of production arrangements. Aslam Saleem tried to keep regular contractors in place and arranged payment for them on piece rate. At another factory near Rana Palace, full time staff were mostly employed on salary basis. Full time workers, however, also acted as contractors bringing in friends and relatives to work under them in separate pay arrangements. In Aslam Saleem's factory, too, the possibility of becoming a *thēkēdār* was available to workers, as Aslam describes:

"It depends, if the worker wants more money, then he can work as a contractor. If they want to be silent workers and do not want more money, but fixed monthly pay then they can work on a salary basis. [...] Sometimes an outside person wants only one day of work, to take the money and go. This type of work is only labour work. It is only the helper who can do this. The permanent worker I keep only on a salary basis, if they want to stay then they stay on salary. If some worker wants more money, then he can make a group [with others] and I give him one item to do and he can get the money when he finishes".

In a workshop in the city, some distance from Aslam's factory, I met Mustaqim. Mustaqim had been in the buffing line for fifteen years. In that time he had worked in various factories and was currently doubling as a *thēkēdār* employing four others. Mustaqim was in his mid-twenties and sported a neatly trimmed moustache. I first met him at his home having been introduced by Mohammad Arshad. His life story sheds some light on his rise to position of *thēkēdār* and also problematizes the line between the contractor and another ambiguous figure, the *ustad*:

"My grandfather did woodwork also, I'm third generation. My father was very poor so I thought that I can find lots of money in this industry. Then I learned this work. I learned it from the *ustad*. Well he was my *ustad* but also a bit like my contractor. He had a separate shop. He worked in the factory but worked part time in his shop also. My *ustad* took the work from other factories and gave it to us in the workshop. Actually at this time I never went in the factory but only in my *ustad*'s workshop.

My *ustad* was a fine person and bought tools for me to do the work. I never told him that I wanted to do work on a salary or contract basis. I told him that ‘when he realises that I am perfect in the work then he can give me work according to my ability’. Actually my *ustad* also had little money but bought me tools on credit and set me up in my own workshop. He was a nice person and gave me the customer to start the work. This was the starting of my work. He made a deal between the customer and me on a contract base. This was my first contract”.

This first contract, provided by his *ustad*, was based in a factory and allowed Mustaqim to employ other workers in order to fulfil orders. This, and his comment that his *ustad* who was a ‘bit like a contractor’, begins to hint at some of the ways in which roles can overlap. Here the traditional position of the *ustad* as a master and patron is blurred with that of the *thēkēdār*. *Thēkēdārs* too occupy roles that in many ways reflect the position previously occupied by *ustads*. The relationship between worker and *thēkēdār* can, then, be one of patronage as well as employer. Indeed, it is often the case that a piece rate employed craftsman in a factory may in turn employ apprentices whom he makes a separate arrangement with. These apprentices, then, exist both within the *ustad-shagird*¹¹⁰ (master/apprentice) relationship, but also in an arrangement that in many ways echoes that of those employed by a labour contractor.

Thēkēdārs in factories and workshops are not only drawn from the same pool of labour as those who work under them but often come through the same system themselves, training with an *ustad* or working under a *thēkēdār* previously. At the Noida Expomart I met Sanjay, a Hindu exporter. Later I called to interview him and visit his small factory. I was introduced to Sajid, a *thēkēdār* who works alongside his staff on varnishing. His story also reflects overlapping roles:

“First of all I was just labour with my *ustad*. I learned this work from the *ustad*. He was also a *thēkēdār*, like me. I am a *thēkēdār* but if some boy comes to me he can learn the work. My condition at that time was like this. After training, though, that person can go anywhere for work.

I started this work five years ago. First of all I learned from the *thēkēdār* but his payment was not so good so I left and went to another person. The other *thēkēdār* told me I would get per day salary so I worked there. Then I made

¹¹⁰ The Hindi term for master is ‘Guru’ but Muslims generally use the Urdu ‘Ustad’.

up my mind that I should start my own work. I knew that my speed was slow but I was full of hope at that time. I did work for a short time near a third person and after that I started my own work in another factory. There was no problem with my old *thēkēdār* [when I started my own work] as in this industry you can see lots of *thēkēdār*s. But before starting my own work I took permission from my *ustad* [the first *thēkēdār*], he gave me permission for this work.

In this procedure the owner is tension-free as he gives the burden to me. From the appointment of labour to preparation of work. The owner does not have to worry. He only wants it ready on time. For urgent orders it is my responsibility to collect the workers. It is a problem and the owner doesn't want to do this. To collect lots of workers and watch all the time creates a great headache. If the workers or the owner have any problem they complain to me. I am the link between the owner and the worker.

It is very simple [to get labour] as we know every worker's number and address. Sometimes we go to their home and ask them to come. Sometimes, though, they refuse and say that they have taken advance money from their owner so cannot. In this situation, if I have an urgent need of workers, then I will pay his advance money and take that worker".

Rather than the slow process of earning ones stripes, Sajid's story reveals a rapid rise to *thēkēdār* even prior to becoming fully competent himself. This ease of retaining *thēkēdār* status reflects Aslam Saleem's comment that any worker can become a *thēkēdār*. Sajid's story also begins to highlight the complexities of the advance payments system in Saharanpur. De Neve (1999), in work on Tamil Nadu's weaving industry, describes this as a form of 'neo-bondage'. 'Neo-bondage' differs from traditional notions of labour bondage where the worker is tied to a particular employer's advance money which he/she must repay before being able to leave with debt often being forced on the worker (i.e. Brass, 1990). Instead workers actively sought advance money and utilised various means to play the system (see also: Lerche, 1995) by, for example, "repaying debts, shifting factories and employers, escaping from town and various forms of foot-dragging and indiscipline often successfully undermining their employers' desperate search for a sufficient and permanent labour force" (p.402-403). In Saharanpur high demand for labour not only means *thēkēdār*s and owners attempt to bind labour through advance payment and that workers seek advances, but *thēkēdār*s

also find themselves having to un-bind labour from others in order to keep up their own workload.

Both Sajid and Mustaqim are not just *thēkēdārs*, but also work on a daily basis alongside their labour force. This forms an important part of a relationship that must negotiate both the trust of workers and the factory owner, as Mustaqim explains:

“The owner is very intelligent and will give the work only to the person who is best. If my work is excellent then the owner is sure there will be no mistake. That is why the owner chooses one person who can do all the work to his satisfaction. He gives responsibility to the contractor in whom he believes. We are two brothers and the owner keeps us as contractors. We appoint more craftsmen, but the first duty is ours. We watch every step closely as we are careful about everything. I know every worker’s house so I can go very easily and ask them to come for work. I have knowledge of the people who are workers and where they live. A contractor always stays in touch with workers. This is a must so I can find them easily”.

Maintaining the allegiance of workers may not always be successful. Relations with workers may be close, however, many *thēkēdārs* tolerate indiscipline to maintain the status quo. For contractors, such as Sajid and Mustaqim, their position is fragile. Whilst successful contractors can gain wealth, there is always the risk of slipping back into the labour force either as a result of not being able to retain workers or as a consequence of losing contracts, these often being mutually reinforcing. Often there is no clear distinction between contractors and labour, instead there is overlap and slippage. There is also the question of accessibility. The dream may be to become an owner, but given the capital requirements it is the role of contractor which proves obtainable (see also: De Neve, 2014). For workers labouring under contractors there are advantages and disadvantages. The distinction between the two, however, is highly fluid and as such there is not the kind of separation seen between contract-based and directly employed workers as in some formal sector industries (i.e. Parry, 2013). Control of the labour force, then, is partly bound up in a variety of socially embedded but negotiated obligations. Yet social relations alone are not sufficient to fully unpack the processes and technologies at work in informal industries such as that in Saharanpur.

Those who have experienced upward social mobility by transcending between labour and ownership are by no means secure, often returning to labour work. Arshad's friend, Mohammad Aslan, is a former petty owner, who now works as labour elsewhere in India:

“I've been working in this line for 22 years. I did not go to school but studied under my *ustad* in a workshop near here. I saved some money as I got better in the work. Then I started planning my business. I took the money I had and took wood on credit. Initially I had three people working but slowly this grew over three or four years. I kept taking orders and work and needed more workers to complete it. Eventually I had fifteen people working in my place. My work came from locals on a direct sale basis but I also got orders from people who came from Hyderabad and Kerala. They wanted samples for their showrooms and would then call for me to make more whenever an order came.

The big problem was late payments. This happened often, the showroom owners would say 'oh I will pay you next week' or 'next month'. Due to this I had problems buying the wood and so could not meet orders. Due to this my workers left to go elsewhere, I tried to get them to come back but they refused. It was a fast process, in three to four months my business was finished. I had debts with wood traders and for other things but I managed to sort this by giving them the stock that I had left. After this I went to Vijayawada. I had friends working there and they organised work for me. In Vijayawada I was again labour and was just working for the owner”.

Aslam was not alone in finding late payments an issue. The culture of late payments permeated every level of the industry with large and small producers alike operating in this way. Each Thursday Arshad and I made a round of showrooms and workshops who had contracted work out to him. Often the response was 'aglai hafta Bhai' (next week brother); at other times we received partial payments, although workshop owners continued to give Arshad more work. This system's effect, then, was to tie or bond Arshad to those from whom he received work. This, however, was not bondage of the direct kind; rather it tied workers to contractors, contractors to owners, and owners to global supply chains. Musharraf¹¹¹, a *thēkēdār* who lived in a nearby village and

¹¹¹ Name changed

distributed sub-contracted work amongst his homeworking neighbours, discussed his position between factory owners and individual craftsmen:

“Owners do not pay on time. This is why many people are leaving the industry¹¹². When the problem happens people do not get together. Sometimes, though, the person waiting for payment, his brothers and their workers come together. Two years ago an owner was not paying and the workers I employ came and demanded I went to him. I went and he paid some small amount from whatever was in his pocket. As I did not get all the money workers started to leave me. As a result my work reduced. But exporters need me or people like me so eventually they approached me again and I got the workers back [...] They still do not make the full payments and keep giving me work even while they have not paid the money.

A few years ago people from France asked if I could supply them directly, but I had little capital so said no. The whole industry here is like a human being, the exporters are the brain and we are the hand. They just use their heads in the business and make the money, but we do the work. The exporters do not pay us as they are afraid that small workers will start their own businesses and come into competition with them”.

Late payments are, then, distinct from direct bonding (i.e. Brass, 1990) and from more negotiable forms of ‘neo-bondage’ (De Neve, 1999). With much literature focusing on systems of advance payment, surprisingly little gives attention to late or partial payment as a way of binding workers or intermediaries. There are some exceptions. Parry (2013) describes systems of ‘late payment’ utilised by contractors in a state-run Indian steel plant, suggesting that not only is worker’s employment “chronically insecure but [that they] frequently have to contend with late payment (leading to a kind of labour bondage) or even default” (p.356). However, this only presents late-payments as a single stage in the chain of labour supply where contractors¹¹³ were the perpetrators and workers the victims. Some work from further afield unpacks this further. White

¹¹² There is a common perception expressed by craftsmen and producers that the industry is in decline. However, quantitative data gathered during this research suggests that this may be misplaced with the industry dominated by large numbers of relatively young craftsmen, many of whom are first generation.

¹¹³ It should be noted here that whilst Parry describes some ‘petty’ sub-contractors as being retired steel plant workers, the majority (and certainly larger contractors) were from different backgrounds to the labour they employed. This provides a contrast to Saharanpur and to De Neve’s (2014) work in Tamil Nadu. Parry, however, points out that in nearby private sector companies the position is reversed with many contractors being “trusted former workers, who – to evade the labour laws – have been given charge of some part of the process and have recruited their kinsmen, caste fellows and co-villagers to run it” (p.356).

(2004), for example, describes female homeworkers in a Turkish craft manufacturing industry where:

“Payment for one or more pieces was always withheld to ensure that the women would return with the materials they were given to work with in the next batch. This also had the effect of inducing loyalty, since the women always had to return and, once there, generally asked for another batch of work, rather than for final payment”

(pp.109-110)

Unpacking various layers of the supply chain in Saharanpur, however, shows that the story is much bigger than a tying of contractor to worker alone. Late payments are not merely a means of bonding one individual or group to another but are a technology deployed to bond whole sections of the supply chain in which the various liminal characters are as often victims as they are perpetrators. The closeness of social position between *thēkēdārs* and their labour also means workers are willing to endure a degree of exposure to delayed payment themselves.

Saleem, for example, is 38, works under Sajid and lives in the same *mohalla*. It is at Saleem’s house that we talk about his position:

“Actually the *thēkēdār* is not always bad. If he runs away without paying his business will be stopped. He never runs away with money but it can be late. It is also possible the owner may pay the *thēkēdār* late, meaning he cannot pay us. Many workers think contractors are rude but they never think of problems he faces.

The owner cannot fulfil orders without the contractor so he is necessary. Contractors can make separate departments for carpenters and for polish and cutting machines. Due to this he can prepare the order very quickly. As the contractor can complete the work in a short period this is why he has so much value”.

This ‘value’ is a point of influence for *thēkēdārs*. Owners must also walk a fine line between binding them through partial or deferred payments yet not pushing this so far that the *thēkēdār* leaves altogether. Although Saleem appreciated the ‘freedom’ piece rate arrangements gave him, in order to maximise earnings he often worked long hours. This differs from salaried worker’s arrangements where factory owners deploy various forms of coercion to get workers to stay late. Indeed, some factories switch payment methods for overtime, offering salaried workers piece rate instead of fixed amounts.

Coercive methods include offers of additional pay, but it's also common for the return of outstanding advances to be used as a form of leverage to cajole workers into overtime. This co-opts elements of the non-factory sector where artisan's relative independence and prevalence of notions of 'apna kam' act as the primary technology of labour control. It is to this area of the industry and the production regimes therein that focus now shifts beginning with another important set of actors, the 'big men'.

The Gullies: 'Big Men'

Hajji was one of the 'big men' of the gully economy. He was a large-scale wood supplier and, as such, also a collector of debts. He had his hands in a variety of other, often rather insalubrious, businesses. I was first introduced to him by the rowdy group of young men who operated the workshop next door to Arshad. Middle aged and plump with teeth reddened from obsessive *paan* use, he was quick to assert his status both with regard to myself and the other men. Much of this he affirmed through his use of banter which, although jokey, was often veiled in threats and expressions of authority. When I first met Hajji he told me that he did 'black business' and was 'a dangerous man'. On another occasion he asked if I would like to meet Shabir Ibrahim, brother of the legendary Mumbai gangster Dawood Ibrahim. It took me a few moments to recall that Shabir Ibrahim had died in hit by a rival gang in the 1980s. His threat, then, was clear. On later occasions I visited both his lumber yard and his home for dinner. He explained the challenges of having to retrieve payments saying "they pay later, usually they give the money slowly after making the wood items and selling them. It is very hard to get money from people and I am often having to put pressure on them". Later he elaborated that his ultimate sanction was the threat of violence.

The wood wholesalers sat at the top of the gully hierarchy. The credit they offered contained a cloaked form of interest. Wood was available for later payment but only at an inflated price¹¹⁴. Not all were as aggressive in their tactics as Hajji, nor necessarily as successful. Just as workers and artisans were used to hearing the phrase '*aglai hafta*

¹¹⁴ The prohibition of interest within Islam leads to this requirement for profit from credit to be couched within an alternative frame.

Bhai' (next week brother) in request of payment for their work, so the wholesaler must negotiate the same. Whilst most of the petty producers and individual craft workers operated under the constant shroud of wood on credit, creating a perpetually precarious situation, there were other forms of collective organising present. Informal committee systems, mutual saving groups, or Chit funds, are common across India (Shah et al, 1996; Anderson, 1966). In Saharanpur, however, they were utilised by some craft workers as a means of avoiding credit:

“In the committee we are 20 members and everyone contributes 1000rs per month. We write the names of each member on slips of paper and the name that is picked gets the money. His name is then removed and it continues the next month. The 20 people are neighbours and know each other well so it is done on trust. It is still going now and restarts again and again. When it comes to my turn again then I will buy wood. By doing this I do not have to take wood on credit”.

(A Craft Worker in Kamil Wali Gully, 2011)

Money and credit, then, entered the gullies via two primary conduits: Through a supply chain that provided orders emanating from international and domestic markets and through the sourcing of raw materials. Both contained their own forms of credit which acted in ways that bonded and created obligations. Craft workers and artisans regularly found themselves trapped between these two trajectories. Late payments from those who provided orders, meant that many struggled to pay for the wood they had purchased on credit. Likewise, the inability to collect payment made it difficult to obtain further supplies of wood. Yet as with so many others, artisans and the craft workers they employed often filled liminal and ambiguous roles. They were themselves just as often creditors as they were debtors, although they acted as producers they moonlighted as *thēkēdārs*. Carvers and others, then, operated within a complex web of debt, credit, obligation and circumvention. It is to the ambiguous roles of artisans and workers that I now turn.

The Gullies: Artisans & Workers

“The work goes to many different people and they pass it among themselves. I have the specialist work done by one artisan so that it is all finished the same way but each takes a different part of the final piece and maybe 20 people work on it in total”.

A showroom owner in Saharanpur

Kathakheri, formerly a rubbish dump, was a relatively new market having been established in the 1980s. The original, located at Purana Mandi, had been established since the colonial era. It was distinct from its more recognised neighbour. Whilst Purana Mandi produced mainly for export, Khatakheri was geared more towards the furniture industry, with its produce consumed primarily, although not exclusively, within domestic markets. The market sold to a variety of groups and locations across the country but the largest source of consumption, both in Saharanpur and beyond, was the Muslim middle class. In particular purchases were made, either directly or through the showrooms, for wedding dowry purposes¹¹⁵. In an organisational sense, however, both markets shared the same structure. Clustered at the entrance to each were the showrooms. These provide the public face of the industry. Although some showroom owners had their own production facilities, many outsourced orders to small workshops.

Each day, as I sat in Arshad’s shop, I became privy to a huge variety of comings and goings. Rickshaw *wallahs* ploughed their way between workshops transporting goods in various degrees of completion. Some were independent and had bought a rickshaw as an investment charging whichever workshop required transport. Others were employed by a factory or wholesaler and brought outsourced goods to the gully. At the heart of the organisation of production were the carving shops. These units completed their own stage of production and organised others. Amongst the *kārīgars* (artisans) carvers would often be the first port of call for direct customers, outsourcing factories and showroom owners. From here carvers sent items to neighbouring shops for

¹¹⁵ This is a distinction between South Asian Muslims and Hindus. Whereas Hindu dowries focus mostly on gold and money, Muslims dowries involve more emphasis (although not exclusively) on material items. This may include pots and pans, household items, furniture, bicycles or motorbikes, depending upon the relative wealth of the households involved.

completion. A combination of higher skill and status along with their position as orchestrators placed the carving shops at the top of the production hierarchy.

Next came the other highly specialised trades such as brass inlay work. Then came the *mistrī*¹¹⁶-orientated trades such as carpentry, cutting and polishing. In some cases carvers would recruit a carpenter or cuttar to operate in their shop and at other times the work would be sent out. Whilst carvers orchestrated a lot of 'putting out' others were also involved. In Arshad's shop we received items for brass overlay. Usually this consisted of panels or sections with carving completed that would later be assembled. Although fairly low in the chain Arshad would then negotiate with the buffer to have the brass section shined up. Indeed, across all sections of the gully chain 81% of workshops received outsourced work and a further 52% engaged in further outsourcing themselves¹¹⁷. At the bottom of the status hierarchy in the gully were those jobs perceived as 'dirty work' (see also: Mohsini, 2010). In particular buffing work with its associated levels of dust. This is not to say that it was necessarily lowly paid. Indeed, Mohammad Ishan, whom Arshad used for buffing, told me that he was able to earn more than the carvers. The 'dirty' nature of the work, however, was not the only issue that led to it being seen as lowly. Ishan was already feeling the physical effects of his labour. This was in part due to his prestigious *chai* habit, the sugary liquid he often consumed instead of food to get through the long hours. However, it was his lungs that suffered most. His thin frame regularly heaved with the hacking cough so common of those for whom work consisted of long hours breathing in wood dust. Once Ishan had returned buffed items to our workshop, small orders would be taken back to the sender by Arshad or myself on his bicycle. Larger orders would be picked up by rickshaw. Furniture items would then be sent to a carpenter for assembly, often via the carver, and then on to the polish shops. Small items such as boxes, however, would be taken into the narrower lanes behind the workshop gullies. Here the rickshaw *wallahs* would knock on the steel doors or shout through simple curtain partitions to the women inside, notifying them that work had arrived to be sanded, touched up and varnished¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ Tradesperson/craftsman. It is applied more generally than *kārīgar* and includes mechanics, electricians and plumbers etc.

¹¹⁷ Source: Workshop Surveys

¹¹⁸ I return to the gully spaces in much greater detail in later chapters.

(Not Quite) The End of the 'Putting Out' Network: Women as Homeworkers

In Saharanpur some homeworkers are part of what Balakrishnan (2002) terms 'the hidden assembly line': the realm of female homeworkers. Female homeworkers in Saharanpur are engaged in the latter stages of the supply chain primarily undertaking finishing work on smaller wood items. This consisted of polishing, sanding and touching up defects on items such as boxes, incense holders and *rehals*¹¹⁹. Rao & Husain (1991) argue homeworkers are particularly vulnerable, "since work can be divided and spread out there is an even larger reservoir of potential workers whom the agent can manipulate to bid against each other and push down wages further [as women] undercut each other" (p.190). They suggest this is amplified by women's isolation from a broader system of production. Alavi (1988) breaks female homeworkers into two categories, the first being those whose labour is controlled by family patriarchs who fetch work and handle money, and the second being homeworkers who receive work at the door, retain control of financial transactions but are still reliant on an intermediary. Ability to use homeworkers as a source of cheap labour is cited as a reason for the growth of 'putting out'¹²⁰ in Indian industry, a process which also provides flexible networks of production (Balakrishnan & Sayeed, 2002; Neetha, 2001). Kantor (2002) and Scrase (2003) describe how this has impacted by women's reliance on male intermediaries who sell and market goods.

Gulshan lived in a small house in Suhil colony¹²¹. Her house was rented and she shared the living space, consisting of a small room and open *sehan*¹²², with her children and two buffalos belonging to the landlord. The house was crumbling and the odour of the animals permeated the living space as well as the outer area. Gulshan had been living in rented property ever since her divorce a few years ago. She had been married as a second wife, a fact that she had been unaware of beforehand. After the wedding it had become clear that the marriage had also a form of recruitment as her husband's family looked to utilise her skills as a woodworker. Later, her husband had divorced her. As with many women who work in the industry, Gulshan did finishing work such as filling,

¹¹⁹ Folding stand for the Holy Quran; may also incorporate a lined box section for storage.

¹²⁰ The process by which work is increasingly subcontracted on numerous levels.

¹²¹ Names changed.

¹²² Open courtyard

sanding, polishing and lining of boxes, ornaments and *rehals*, the latter often being for export to the Gulf.

A small lady somewhere in her late 30s with a twitchy air of busyness, Gulshan hurried to prepare *chai* for her new guests¹²³. We were a particularly large group comprising Ayesha, her youngest daughter, her husband and myself. We took our tea and began to chat. From time to time Gulshan shifted her place, at one point sitting next to me and declaring “I can sit by him, he is like my brother”. Once we were settled she began her story. She talked quickly and fidgeted as she narrated her tale:

“I am doing this work from childhood, when I was 13 years old. I was doing it before my marriage because my father’s family were poor. When I was small I used to go into a factory to get the wood for the fire. In that factory I saw some ladies working. I watched them carefully and learnt that way. Later the owner would give me a rupee for some work. In my heart I felt some greediness for money and so I started work. My brother got angry and said that I should not go there. But when my brother went for work I would go silently in the factory. I would come back before lunchtime. It was my trick and through this I learnt the work.

When I went to the factory [after my divorce] the owner gave us work via a servant. He was the only one allowed into the room where ladies worked. There was no problem for us as we could sit comfortably there. [In another factory] there was an owner who was very clever. He always gave advances and often paid late so that workers could not go elsewhere. [That owner] always said that ‘this is an urgent order so you should work late’, but I refused and only agreed to work until evening as I had children. Also, and most important, society would think I was a lady of poor *chal-chalan* [reputation] if I was working late in the factory. I have no husband so people would ask why I’m coming home late. Society can’t understand that I have no money; they always think that I am doing some wrong work if I’m in the factory late.

2-3 years ago I left the factory work as my health is not good. Now I wait for work in my house. The work does not come every day. The work comes from outside factories that have no space. They send it to our home. [There used to be plenty of work] but now everybody likes to do work in their own factory, they never want to send it to anybody’s home. Now I cannot go

¹²³ The story told here is based on a series of visits but for the sake of the reader is presented here as one.

outside of the house as I have the responsibility of my daughters on my shoulders”¹²⁴.

A few doors down the street lived Faiza. Faiza’s home was also simple but was of a sturdier construction and owned by the family. Her husband worked as a truck driver delivering finished wood products all over north India. When we first met he was on route to Shimla and we spoke on the phone with him whilst taking tea in the house. At first it was a little unclear as to why she felt the need to work. Her marriage was good and her husband earned a reasonable wage. The marriage, however, had been somewhat controversial as it was a love marriage and her husband was Hindu. To enable it to take place he had converted to Islam. However, neighbours remained suspicious and complained that he rarely attended the Masjid. While sitting in her home chatting together with Ayesha we got a window into the family’s precarious financial situation when a debt collector called. Faiza begged for more time and explained that her husband was away but that they would pay upon his return.

In spite of her problems, Faiza had a jolly demeanour and happily answered our questions. It was through her that we had originally met Gulshan but on one of our later visits we discovered that the friendship had turned sour as Faiza told us that Gulshan had been undercutting her and taking work at a lower rate:

“[These days] I have no work because of Gulshan. I always used to give some work to her as I had plenty. One day she asked me ‘who is the *malik*’? My heart is very innocent so I told her the address of the factory. She suddenly wore a burka and went in all the factories and then one day my daughter saw that all the *rehri wallahs*¹²⁵ were coming to her house but were not bringing any work to us. I told my daughter that she is mad as this is our *malik*’s work, this must be a mistake. I asked the *rehri wallah* why he was giving the work to that lady as it is our work. He said ‘no the work is for that lady’. Then my daughter got angry with me and shouted at me saying that ‘you are very innocent mother, the times have changed’. You should not help her’! [...] You know I take 50 paisa for each box but that lady has fixed 40 paisa for each. The owner is very clever, so why would he want to give

¹²⁴ The stories here are presented in edited form. They were also gathered over a series of visits but are presented as linear to aid the reader. Whilst the timelines have been adjusted and the extracts linked for the sake of the narrative, the words are directly quoted from informants and not fictionalised.

¹²⁵ A ‘rehri’ is a four wheeled cart. ‘Walla’ in this case refers to the person pushing it (basically a delivery man).

me at 50 paisa? Nowadays we have no conversation between the two families”.

Faiza learnt the work from her mother and following her marriage took it up again to help support the household and pay for her daughter’s education. Her mother, Raisa, lived in the nearby mohalla¹²⁶ of Ali ki Chungi. She was strongly religious and made her namaaz regularly. Although married, her husband was sick and unable to work:

“[Indicating a young girl of 10-12 years] When I was like this girl I started work. This neighbour’s child works with us and I pay her each week. They will eat some small snacks from this money. They are also working to save for the Ghual Fair. There they will buy some toys when it comes each year. The owners are very corrupt, they give money very late. We have to go many times in their shop. One boy called Lucky lived in our neighbourhood, now he is dead. Now his mother is running their business, they are Punjabi. He was really very good and he never gave late money. Now though we have some Muslim *maliks*, they never give us money on time. We cannot show our anger as, if we do, we will not get more work. The owner always tells us not to worry about payment, saying ‘when I get money so then I will pay you, go back to your home’.

Sometimes we take a loan on 10% [interest] and buy some wood. You know only the Punjabis can give us a loan as Muslims do not have enough money and do not want to give poor people loans. So now we are spending a very bad life due to the interest system. Sometimes there is a great fight between the loan giver and my husband. Nowadays I cannot go outside of my house as I have a loan from one lady of 10,000rs and from another of 50,000rs. They want their money back but I am hiding inside my house.

Whilst some of her work came directly from workshops, Faiza’s mother also took work from her neighbour, Farhana. Although a home worker, Farhana held a senior position within the Gully, this being supported by her status as longest-term resident and her connections with local *maliks*. She regularly sub-contracted her own work to other ladies but suffered health effects from her years of toil.

I have worked since childhood, for 50 years. We do repair work and polishing on boxes. [Owners] give us 20, 25 or 40 paisa per box, but 50paisa only comes for big boxes. When we have lots of work from the owner then

¹²⁶ Neighbourhood

we transfer it to other ladies. We are living here in the *behdra*¹²⁷ and we all are poor so we always exchange work with each other.

30 years ago I started this practice of giving work outside. It is through our unity that we distribute the work and due to this we can fulfil urgent orders. No one can complete the urgent order alone. Rather it needs a unity and a great number of home workers. Mostly they work in my home as I prefer this. I want to do the work under my guidance, but if we have lots of orders then I give it to take to their houses. I have many contacts with factories and my work comes from many places and from Lucky's shop here. Lucky's mother's payment is very good. Due to the Muslims her business is growing as she is sitting in a Muslim mohalla. Years ago there were many Hindu families here but they have all settled in the Hindu mohalla. Now she is the only Hindu here. Now no Hindu wants to live in the Muslim mohalla.

I am the oldest lady here and was first to start this work. Due to this I am the senior in this gully. I am a famous lady here; everyone knows that I am giving work to these ladies. First of all the owner wants the work done, but it is my wish if I give it to others. I can go directly in the factories for the work and money. This is not bad for my *chal-chalan* as I am going for the sake of other ladies. These ladies are helpless but if I give them work then Allah will be pleased with me. When payment comes I distribute money among all the ladies.

Many times [though] it happens when one lady goes silently to the owner without my permission or knowledge. It is a big problem in this work that if I am working for 20rs then some other lady goes silently and takes the work for only 15rs. We never get angry as we know that a person gets work according to their *kismet*¹²⁸. The young girls also do the same work for their dowry arrangement".

Whilst Farhana was keen to emphasise the charitable nature of her distribution of work, others saw things differently. Across the road lived Saba. Saba's home appeared fairly large but several generations of the same family crowded the space. Her son worked as a tailor, earning a small amount. Saba, her unmarried daughters and her daughters-in-law were all involved in finishing work, with Saba controlling the money and distribution of work between them. Having often taken work from Farhana, she had recently decided to end the association.

¹²⁷ Old colloquial term for mohalla (neighbourhood), little used nowadays.

¹²⁸ Fate/ destiny.

“I have left her work as we have to do 100 boxes in a day and get just 10 rupees for that. ‘*Hamara wasta kahtam*¹²⁹’ [our relationship is finished], it was my decision to end this relationship. Why should we do hard work for only 10rs? I told her that we are happy without her work. But now I cannot go direct to the *maliks* as she is fixed for this. She is senior in the work. She was the first lady living in this area. We come from a village. We asked her for an increase but she refused, she tells us that ‘the owner only gives me 10 paisa for each box. He never increases it so how can I give you more’. She is also very poor and has many problems, we know this. She is the senior lady in this area and is head in the gully. She is a very clever lady and when she has lots of work she comes in our house and says that she has lots of urgent orders and after our help the owner is happy and she can finish her order on time. We are just like fools when we are doing her work. She gets benefit and is making a fool of our family”.

Here then, we begin to see that networks among homeworkers extend beyond the initial ‘putting out’ stage. Additional layers of wealth extraction lie hidden. Yet moral discourses also interplay with this. Gulshan talks of previously going for factory work, but describes how she does so in a way that preserves her *chal-chalan*. Farhana also uses the discourse of charity to justify going directly to factories in search of work. She protects her *chal-chalan*, as she takes this burden to ‘aid other women’. Competition is rife, in no small part due to the limited amount of work available. As with male *thēkēdārs* and craftsmen, roles are often ambiguous and may coalesce around various forms of authority exercised by different actors. In spite of this, however, there is also a degree of cooperation within networks of homeworkers.

This situates women within a position in the supply chain where hand work dominates but also where the status and skill-level of the work is perceived as low. Work is hard and many are engaged for long hours on much lower pay than their male counterparts. Health problems are not uncommon with bodies suffering the strain of constant sitting and repetitive labour. I do not intent to argue that Muslim women are not marginalised in the industry. Indeed, they are. However, exploring these networks and supply chains reveals a more nuanced story where women are involved in a variety of putting out both

¹²⁹She uses the term *wasta* as discussed in chapter 1.

within and beyond their own homes. In these processes of 'putting out' they hold positions that may make them both at times, exploited and exploiter. Competition is constant and there can be a willingness to undercut one's neighbour in the fight for work. Neighbourhood relations can, however, involve an appreciation for the position of other women in terms of passing the work around or providing financial support in the form of *karz* (informal credit-free loans). It is also within these neighbourhoods and families that women are recruited into the industry.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the depth and complexity of a supply chain within the confines of one city and industry. Each level of the chain has a variety of additional strata resident within it. The structural organisation of each overlaps with others, as well as with a variety of cultural and moral factors. These overlaps are actively utilised by owners of factories in order to usurp the sense of 'apna kam', which drives much self-regulation among craft workers in smaller workshops, in order to secure these affective aspects of the gully economy within factory walls. This is achieved through both articulations which reflect the language of the gully and by paying piece rates or utilising contractors. In locating the stories of Gulshan, Arshad, Mustaqim, Sajid and others within this milieu, the aim is to better understand confines, barriers, opportunities and mobilities that intersect their lives. It also gives a sense of the ways in which old and new as well as cultural and economic elements of the arena of production in the city are integrated into global processes. Here, as Tsing (2009) suggests, the variety and 'diversity of niches' present fit well with supply chain capitalism, a process that is negotiated through various levels of 'putting out'. However, niches are also formed through spaces and networks which are actively mobilised by owners, contractors, craft workers and labourers themselves. Not only is production within an informal economy reliant on niches, it also depends upon the bonds of obligation and reciprocity that can only be formed by those with little social distinction between themselves and the labour they employ or pass work to. This blurring of class, through multiple layers of subcontracting and ambiguity, is a critical component of informality (Harriss-White, 2003). It allows production to operate through networks that are themselves informal

in nature and ensures reduced opportunity for class-based action. Yet workers and others are in constant negotiation with their structural conditions and utilise various tactics to create space. In addition, as following chapters illustrate, a lack of clearly defined class action does not mean an absence of collectivity. However, collectivity itself does not always create structures that are definable as resisting capitalism or processes of accumulation. Indeed, as will be shown, they can also act to reinforce such processes and hence embody the duality present in niche based supply chains (Tsing, 2012).



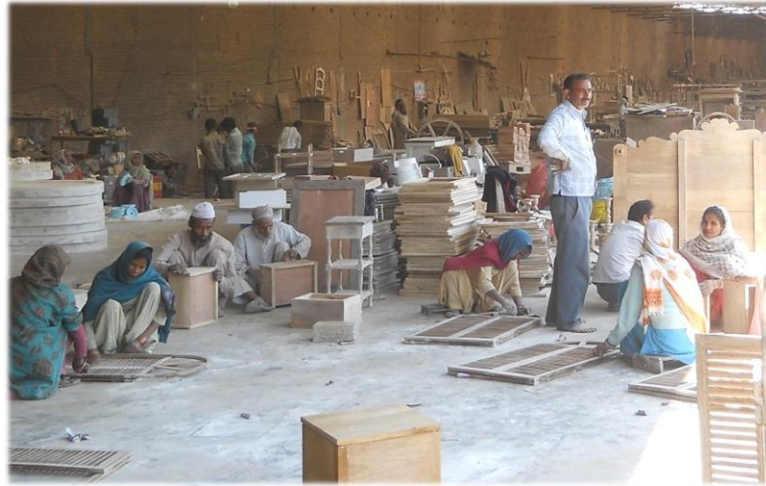
Not all about work: Mustaqim's neighbour lets her hair down at a wedding party

PART TWO

‘JOURNEYS WITHIN’

Chapter Four

From Home to Factory: Purdah, Work & Women in Saharanpur



Women on the production line doing finishing work under the oversight of a *thēkēdār*

This chapter builds on the final section of the last, continuing the focus on female workers. Whilst the previous chapter dealt with women's locations within supply chains, here the focus shifts to work within both factory and home. Initially this chapter continues the discussion on networks among women and focuses on the gendered nature of working environments and how processes of recruitment and 'learning to labour' take place. In addition, the chapter deals with the nature of competition and relations among women, and between men and women. Whereas the previous chapter dealt with this in terms of homeworkers, this chapter explores relations between homeworkers and factory workers, and between Muslim and non-Muslim workers. This inter-religious dynamic is set in the context of a recent influx of Chamar women into the industry. Finally, the chapter discusses the ways in which both homeworkers and factory workers navigate the morality of engaging in paid work. These negotiations are

contextualised in terms of *chal-chalan* (reputation/character)¹³⁰ both amongst workers themselves and with regard to wider society.

This forms a particularly difficult terrain, not least in the context of my own positionality. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, much of the empirical data discussed here was gathered by Ayesha with only later visits involving myself. Her voice, therefore, is very much a part of these stories. On my return to the field, a year after my initial departure, I presented Ayesha with, what was then, a draft version of this chapter. For Ayesha there were certain areas that had not been sufficiently addressed. It is with Ayesha's words that I start:

"Due to this work there is a lot of competition between neighbours. In Manak Mau¹³¹ the situation was very controversial because there live both Muslim and Chamari ladies. Both sets of ladies criticised each other but the main friction was about the work. The Hindu ladies thought that the Muslim ladies were characterless as they came late at night. They wore the burkha but they did not really care about *purdah* or follow the system. When I went there at 9pm the Muslim ladies were in their homes and the Chamari ladies were coming later as they have no veil system. On the other hand Muslim ladies criticise Chamari ladies, they think that they never need money but just go for enjoyment. In Kajour Tala I met one lady who was not mentioned in this chapter. She was very tortured by her husband because she was not pretty. He ran away to another town.

Another important point is that some young lady workers are doing this work only for dowry. You know they have a dream in their mind 'oh today I have to do lots of work, when money will come I can buy this pot or some piece of jewellery'. This is a big reason pushing them to work. Parents also force their daughter's to do this work for their dowries".

Ayesha's comments begin to hint at the complex reasons for participating in paid work and the fact that the gendered nature of work amongst women in Saharanpur is cross-cut by other distinctions such as caste, religion and status. I return to this shortly but begin with a broader discussion of Muslim women and work in India and beyond.

¹³⁰ Not an easily translatable term but broadly speaking it means character, reputation or 'how society sees you'. It carries a great deal of weight and strength and is used mostly, although not exclusively, by, and with reference to, women.

¹³¹ A village close to Saharanpur.

Contextualising Muslim Women & Work in India

A great deal of the literature around Muslim women and work in India focuses on 'low labour force participation' (i.e. Das, 2005; Mistry, 1998; Raju, 1999)¹³². Using the Muslim Women's Survey (MWS)¹³³, Hasan & Menon (2005) suggest participation is around 14%. This they compare to other marginalised groups such as Scheduled castes (30%) and Other Backwards Castes (22%). Das (2005) suggests this is larger with 36% of Hindu and 16% of Muslim women participating in paid work¹³⁴. These differing figures hint at potential issues in the data. Indeed, most contributors acknowledge the problematic of defining labour force participation (Olsen & Mehta, 2006)¹³⁵ and the tendency of respondents themselves to discount some types of economically contributory work (Hasan & Menon, 2004) which blur categories of 'housework', 'homework' and 'paid work'. According to MWS¹³⁶ results, urban Muslim women in North India are most likely to be categorised as 'self-employed' (60%) and are primarily involved in artisan trades¹³⁷ (Hasan & Menon, 2004). Generally the focus regarding Muslim women in North India is on homework (i.e. Scrase, 2003; Wilkinson-Weber, 1999; Bhatti, 1987). Indeed, some tie this up with notions of seclusion and see it as an active choice (Bhatti, 1987). This tends toward a conclusion that North Indian Muslim women do not 'go out' to work. As mentioned, larger factories of Saharanpur often employ both Muslim and Hindu women. This is not to say that such considerations play no part. However, it eludes to a complex series of discussions which require some unpacking.

Islam and women's labour have long had a somewhat frictional relationship. Tripp (2006), for example, sees this as playing out between the ambivalence of capitalism, with its apparent gender-blindness, and Islam's emphasis on gender segregation. He argues that a "socially embedded market was by no means gender blind: women were regarded as a cheaper form of labour" (p.168). Whereas Tripp focuses on the role of

¹³² This stands in contrast to studies of Muslim women in South East Asia and, to a lesser degree, Bangladesh. A point I shall return to later.

¹³³ The Survey covered nearly 10,000 Indian women comprising 80% Muslim and 20% Hindu.

¹³⁴ NSSO (1994).

¹³⁵ Olsen & Mehta discuss how definitions of labour force participation vary from country to country, often exclude more subtle forms of economic contribution and entirely ignore domestic work. Raju (1993) adds that the definitions are often "inadequate in a partially commoditised economy where a significant portion of goods and services are produced for self-consumption" (p.2).

¹³⁶ Muslim Women's Survey (2001)

¹³⁷ A trait also reflected in male employment patterns.

male scholars in laying out the moral terrain for Muslim women, Mahmood (2005) suggests that too often 'western' or 'universalist' claims of human rights or feminist discourse paint an image of Muslim women (particularly those ascribing to values of piety and *purdah*) as agentless, submissive to patriarchal systems and self-defeating in their cultural practice. Mahmood asks that we move away from seeing such constructions as resulting only from external forces and instead consider how they are "...not so much an attribute of the body [but a] characteristic of the individual's interiority, which is then expressed in bodily form" (p.161). Just as expressions of piety can be constraining, Mahmood brings to light the ways in which its practice simultaneously opens up certain capacities and resources. For those attempting to follow a more observant doctrine, engagement with labour markets can be particularly challenging (ibid)¹³⁸. However, unlike Mahmood's examples from Cairo, not all of the women discussed here saw themselves as particularly observant or pious. For many more practical concerns were foremost, particularly those facing the greatest levels of poverty. Yet even here notions of *chal-chalaan* and concerns around *purdah* were a part of women's negotiation of work. However, *purdah* itself is not a fixed moral terrain but rather one that is negotiated in a variety of ways. Before returning to the ethnographic narrative it is necessary to unpack this in further detail.

Purdah & Work: Labouring behind & in-front of the Curtain

To the outside eye Saharanpur, or the Muslim neighbourhoods at least, give the appearance of relative conservatism in the practice of *purdah*. Yet, the relationship with, and effect upon, work and economic interaction is little explored. The application of *purdah* varies from region to region and according to caste and social status. As Hasan & Menon (2004) suggest: "In the north zone (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), which is generally more conservative and patriarchal, cultural norms govern women's work outside and often work is treated as a mark of low status" (p. 117). It is, however, important to emphasise that this is not exclusive to North Indian Muslims. Indeed, it is

¹³⁸ Mahmood refers to this in the context of the pious virtue of *al-haya* (shyness/modesty). In Saharanpur this is primarily framed in terms of *chal-chalaan* (reputation/character). Although they have similar implications for negotiating work they are not identical, with the former focusing more on person or personality and the latter more on 'how society sees you'.

often high caste Hindus who enforce *purdah* most rigorously, particularly in rural areas (Das, 2005; Sen, 1999). Chen (1995) ranks the status of women in a North Indian village according to the spaces in which they work. Here, the lowest status women work both within and outside the village in public areas. As status rises, however, women labour in increasingly more confined spaces, with those of highest standing working only within the walls of the home. Das Gupta (1995) adds that the practice of *purdah* is not static throughout the lifecycle, with older women having greater physical mobility. Whereas it is tempting to see *purdah* purely in terms of physical concealment, Lateef (1990) suggests that even where Indian Muslim women do not live in *purdah*, “the ‘*purdah* mentality’ continues to affect the attitudes of women” (p.133).

Lateef sees the story as double-sided and suggests that when it comes to labour, for “women forced to work [due to economic hardship], *purdah* can be both liberating and a status symbol” (p.134). Simultaneously, though, it can reduce access to broader society and to other women. Baden (1992) takes the sense of agency in *purdah* practice further for both non-working and working women:

“One pragmatic explanation advanced for the revival of interest in Islam among lower income women (as evidenced by the increase in veiling) is that women may be reasserting Islamic norms to try to resist entry into low paid, undesirable work. Alternatively, as a consequence of being forced to enter the labour force, women are increasingly in the public sphere and are using veiling both as a means of protection and as a way of reasserting Islamic norms, and thus their claim on husbands' support”.

(p. 28-29)

Alavi (1988), however, discusses women who experienced increased *purdah* during the green revolution as resenting the change, in that “as well as their freedom of movement they had also lost much of their prized economic freedom” (p.1328). Lateef (1990), though, critiques the view that *purdah* women are necessarily absent from various aspects of public life and economic activity. Whilst some contributors link low labour force participation with *purdah*, Hasan and Menon (2004) urge caution. Pointing to their analysis of the MWS data they suggest that “for our respondents, *purdah* is neither the primary nor secondary reason for not taking up employment outside the home [...] too much should not be made of cultural norms in explaining the exclusion of Muslim

women from work participation" (p.114). Lateef (1990) makes a similar point. However, she also suggests that work done by Muslim women can be distinct from other groups.

In Saharanpur, however, women were active in both homes and factories. In factories, Kabeer (2000) suggests that purdah, itself, can allow women to create new economic opportunities. Kabeer describes how: "Women were clearly aware of the negative views of [...] wider society. By taking up outside employment, they were effectively accepting the cultural costs such employment entailed" (p.88). Kabeer, however, argues that factory workers renegotiated cultural norms to moralise their activity. Drori (2000) describes similar processes of renegotiation amongst Arab female workers in Israel and cites an informant who justifies 'going out' for work to her father: "I told him that I would give him respect too. I told him that I wanted to buy a stove and a refrigerator for my wedding" (p. 99). Although Muslim women find ways of vindicating factory work, Drori suggests that the prevalence of unemployment amongst the male Arab population is also a contributing factor. Kabeer (2000) acknowledges this in Bangladesh, suggesting that: "It is in this perceived erosion of the patriarchal contract, and the increasing inability of men to sustain the model of male breadwinner, that the genesis of women's entry into factory employment has to be understood" (p.140). In Calcutta's jute mills recruitment of women allowed employers to obtain cheap labour, but also "the existing negative perceptions about women's participation in factory work drew male workers and unions into collaboration with mill management" (Sen, 1999; p.124). In Java, owners were able to use a degree of female autonomy, within local culture, to recruit while simultaneously deploying patriarchal ideology to keep wages low as unmarried women remained economically reliant on family, hence capable of labouring on a wage below subsistence levels (Wolf, 1992).

Purdah, then, is applied and negotiated in differing contexts. It may involve blending *Brahmic* (high/priestly caste) and colonial Victorian values among upwardly mobile Hindus (Sen, 1999) or be renegotiated to provide economic opportunity by Bangladeshi garment workers (Kabeer, 2000). During reflection on cultural tendencies toward seclusion and its association with status, Muzumdar (1990) points out that whilst "the ideal woman need not work it is not recognised that the actual woman must and does

work” (p.279). It is to these realities, in the context of Saharanpur’s labour force, which I now turn.

From Homework to Factory Work: Moving within & between Spaces

The presence of women in Saharanpur’s workforce is nothing new. Faiza’s mother Raisa¹³⁹, now into her 60s, had been working since childhood. The gully’s informal supervisor, Farhana, also started as a child pausing only briefly after her marriage. Recruitment was generally informal with older women teaching their sisters, daughters, daughters-in-law, other younger relatives and neighbours. On other occasions husbands and fathers taught wives and daughters. For many this was seen as a nonchalant process requiring no ‘real learning’: “it is very easy work, I have no special training. When I see my mother doing it so I learn it from her, nobody trained me just by seeing I learned it” (A Home Worker in Ali Ki Chungi). Some younger girls received a little pocket money from mothers or sisters, others not. This is not to say, however, that women were always in control of the money. For those working in a family business where fathers and brothers were involved in other stages of production, money was usually controlled by the men, as Hashmed from Purana Thana Mandi explains:

“My husband deals with [money] as that is his duty. I don’t take any money, all the money goes to my husband and son. All payments are collected by my son but if I need money for my medicine then I ask for it. What would I do with money; I am just doing my work. As it is our own business and not from outside so there is no question of asking for money”.

Although often the case within family businesses, this is not to say that the presence of a male breadwinner in the household always meant that women always lost control of their income:

“I do not give money to my husband, why would I give it to him [laughs]? I do not give any money to my daughter [either]. All the money stays in my pocket. It is for the children, for their school fees and clothes”.

(Sana, a homemaker)

¹³⁹ See previous chapter.

Senior women often handled earnings and organised the labour of other female family members. Here, though, Kantor (2002) warns that many female homeworkers only retain control of their income as it is often so small that it rouses little interest from male family members. A large number, particularly in factories, retained this control on the basis of being widowed, divorced or separated.

However, even where women have control over money within the household, they remain dependent on men and contractors for both work and payment. Women, such as Sana, were still reliant on intermediaries from whom payments were often late, disputed or never materialised:

“The owner is very corrupt, they give money very late. We have to go many times in their shop. They cannot understand our situation and sometimes they give our money 1-2 months late. Sometimes, though, some owners run away and we cannot find our money. [...] Once we have done 10,000 boxes. The owner said to us to do some 5000 extra boxes before payment. I thought we would get a big amount of money but suddenly he ran away from Saharanpur and we did not see him again”.

(Raisa, a homeworker in Ali ki Chungi)

The stories examined here also illustrate the degree to which internal competition among homeworkers themselves can keep earnings further suppressed:

“In this area competition is too much, so work is not regular. Sometimes we have no work and we stay in our home and wait for work [...] it is very bad as the work is very little so the competition is very high. If we find work then the rate of piece is very little so there is no benefit from the work”.

(Shazia, a young homeworker in Kajhoor Tala)

Changes in ‘putting out’ practice have intensified the competitive environment with homeworkers experiencing a perceived threat from women in factories. Here Gulshan explains that over the past five or six years rural and Chamar women started factory work:

“Nowadays I have little work. [...] The owner prefers to give the work to factory ladies. He does not want to send work to our house as it is costly. Now many ladies are going to the factories, I also did some time ago but not

now as my daughter is grown up. There is lots of work in the factories but I cannot go there. [...] undoubtedly due to these ladies we get a lot less work in our house”.

Whilst acknowledging the impact on her level of work she did not blame those going to the factories, instead attributing this change to *kismet* (fate):

“It is our own kismet. We find employment due to our kismet not because of any Chamari lady. If she is Muslim or Hindu it is not a big matter, everybody finds work according to their kismet. Everyone is equal whether they are Muslim, Hindu or Chamar. It is Allah’s duty to give us roti and employment so we cannot blame any Chamari ladies”.

Recent restructuring of the industry has seen factory workers threaten an area of the labour market that homeworkers used to dominate. This runs counter to trajectories within other industries where factory workers experience a threat to their labour arrangements as producers tend toward increased outsourcing (i.e. Balakrishnan & Sayeed, 2002; Neetha, 2001). However the factories are not closed to homeworkers. Indeed, Gulshan, had worked in both environments.

For many homeworkers there are considerations originating from notions of *chalachalan*. Nasreen, another former factory worker, described her reasons for switching to homework:

“It is bad and worthless [in factories] as there is no partition between men and ladies so there is not any value of the veil. Due to this I left the factory. Those who do not wear the burka or believe in the veil are comfortable in the factories. But for women like me who give importance to these things then the factories are not good places to work. This work is useless for Muslim ladies. Our burka and veil is destroyed in the factory so we should not go there. Only in [one] factory did we find some separate room for work. We were there able to do our work, like packing, in the office”.

For Raisa even the possibility of a better income was not sufficient to convince her to go to a factory:

"I never go in the factory and I have no idea of the *chal-chalan* of the women there. I hear that the factory workers get better money. They have no tension as they have less work but get more money. I cannot go outside of my house, you know it is not good and I am so fearful about factories. Once I went to a lady who was a factory worker. At that time I had a great need of money and she told me that the factory workers work separately from men but, she also told me, that there is no veil system in the factory and that any man can come in the room at any time. We discussed it in the house but my daughter said 'don't go mother'. Then my husband strictly ordered me 'don't go outside of this house whether you have food or not'".

Her daughter Faiza expressed a similar view regarding factories. For Faiza, however, the problem of maintaining one's *chal-chalan* was not limited to factory work:

"It is respected work as we are doing this work in our home. If we go to factories then we have no respect in society. She [my daughter] always wants to hide our identity in school and not show that we are labour so she has always wanted me to leave this work, but I try to convince her that there should be no shame in hard work because we are not asking for money like a beggar. We are eating our roti in a respectful manner. Our society easily blames ladies if they see them work in a factory or with an unknown man, but they cannot understand why we may go. I may go for a job or my roti. Our society is blind they never think that it may be possible that she has some problem and that is why she is outside. They just think that she is a characterless lady but I don't care about society as I always love and respect my woodwork. I am doing this work at my home with respect".

Sabra was one of many women who came from the nearby village of Manaak Mau. The village was a large supplier of female labour with women old and young, Muslim and Hindu, making the daily commute. Women generally made the journey to factories within these groups. Sabra had worked in the factories for six years. Having struggled to support her family, other factory workers from the village encouraged her to join them. As with many factory workers we met she was divorced and caring for her three children. She was very vocal and often raised her voice:

"Oh there are no facilities for ladies [in the factory]. There is no separate place, whether the women follow veil system or not they never wear a veil in the factory. It does not matter whether the lady belongs to a respectful family or that her *chal-chalan* is good. If we say that we need a separate

place or some veil then the owner always shouts at us to go back home and says that they need workers, not the veil or burka. He needs work until 6pm. [...] Nowadays the times are changing and so it is better that I keep silent on these issues. If we belong to a respectable family or if our nature is good then we should keep quiet in the factory. If ladies say anything about our problems then there will be a great dispute. If any lady's *chal-chalan* is good then she will not talk to another man. She should live separately from the gents. I know that the atmosphere in the factories is very bad. It is my rule that I never want to talk to any gents.

When the lady is in her house it is very respectable but when a lady goes outside then there is no respect in this society. I cannot prove if I am outside that my *chal-chalan* is good and that I am *paak daaman*¹⁴⁰. It is our bad condition that means we have to go to Saharanpur each day. I know that the veil system is very necessary in Islam. Sometimes in the factories the gents are really very rude. Some gents address me like a dog 'tu'¹⁴¹. I never talk to men in the factory as I know that they are shameless. Sometimes there is fighting between gents and me. The gents tell me that I am not very smart or pretty. They say "if you are 'paak daaman' then go to your home". If you belong to a respectable family then you would not come to the factory. I have to bear this blame silently. If I did not then my job would be finished".

In spite of having to negotiate such terrain there are advantages to factory work. Wages tend to be higher with workers earning around 90-100rs per day (homeworkers make around 25-50rs per day). The evaluation of the pros and cons of engaging in factory work was not to be found simply in economic gain. However, whilst factory work provides a higher and potentially more stable income it does not necessarily negate some of the other problems faced by homeworkers. As mentioned previously, women in Saharanpur's factories were often treated as a flexible labour force. Whilst some were directly employed others worked through male *thēkēdārs*. However, as with homeworkers, there was none of the close bond common in male worker-*thēkēdār* relationships, where links of neighbourhood and origin created a degree of mutual trust. Indeed, many of the problems and risks faced by homeworkers in the 'putting out' process were also present for female factory workers labouring under *thēkēdārs*:

¹⁴⁰ Colloquial expression meaning literally 'pure shawl' but in this case refers to purity of character.

¹⁴¹ In Hindi 'tu' meaning 'you' is generally only used for animals or children (usually if being told off). It is the lowest in terms of respect with 'ap' being the most formal (i.e. for parents, teachers or elders) and 'tum' being the casual form used among friends or equals.

“They even run away with our payment, it has happened many times with me. The contractor is very bad and always runs away with our money. The owner is not responsible for this incident as the *thēkēdār* takes the money, so the owner is free from any fight. [...] The *thēkēdār* always pretends that he will give us money next week but then tells us it will be the following Friday. The *thēkēdār* is a scoundrel so we cannot trust him. [...] If we go to the owner’s office then he shouts ‘I have not appointed you, you should go and search for the *thēkēdār*’. He tells us that it is not his responsibility”.

(Fareeda, a Muslim factory worker from Kamela Colony)

This is not to say that all *thēkēdār*s are ‘scoundrels’ but rather that switching from homework to factory work does not represent a complete move away from the ‘putting out’ system. Likewise, it does not negate divisions which are driven by competition for work. In factories, too, competition is high with women competing for positions and shop floor relations often divided. As with Sen’s (1999) 19th century Bengali jute mills these exist partly along divisions of gender. However, even among women there are additional splits:

“[In our factory] we are three Hindu and twelve Muslim ladies. We can talk together but always at lunchtime we sit separately. All Muslim ladies take their lunch after Namaaz, but Hindu ladies take their lunch straight away at one-o-clock”.

(Nasreen, a factory worker from Manaak Mau)

“[In the factory where I work] Muslim ladies are few but Hindu ladies come there in great numbers. The low caste ladies like Chamari go there too much. Sometimes there is a fight between us. The Chamari ladies have everything, they live in a good standard and they have a house and money. They only go for the work to get money for their fun and enjoyment. The poor Muslim ladies go due to their poverty. Some are widows, some go because her son does not give her any money but the Chamari ladies only go for ‘time-pass’. One Chamari lady is going with her young girls, she has a house that the BSP government gives them as they are of the same caste. She has no need of work but we have many problems and get no help from the government”.

(Ayesha, a Muslim factory worker from Manaak Mau)

In spite of these divisions we did find moments of unity. The presence of Chamari women had, for some workers, provided an opportunity to challenge factory owners. Sitara from Ali ki Chungi was a 50 year old factory worker. Some fifteen years ago, when her children were small her husband passed away. After completing *iddah* (mourning period)¹⁴² she took a job in one of the city's largest factories but found conditions not to her liking. The work was hard, her hand often bled from the *rigmal* (sandpaper), overtime was compulsory and payment often late. She eventually moved to a smaller factory where she works today. Although the work is tough, she was thankful for the income and found the owner reliable. As with Nasreen's factory, Chamar and Muslim women ate separately but relations were generally friendly. Sitara describes how, gradually, the women had started to speak up together:

"Now we are raising our voice and asking for 120rs per day. There is no union but we have some unity. Now we have taken the decision that we will not work for less than 100rs per day. We will only work if the amount is 100, 110 or 120rs. In saying this we are both Chamari and Muslim. But you know the Chamari women are responsible for this increment. You know the Muslim lady is timid, she cannot shout or raise her voice, but the Chamari ladies can. They raised their voices and we followed".

This is not to suggest weakness or 'timidness' on behalf of Muslim women but is, in part, tied up with the fact that Chamars have seen their position and political representation increase considerably in recent years. The BSP government have been active in improving the conditions and political voice of low caste groups who form their primary vote base. Yet restrictions of purdah alone do not fully account for the types of constraint present. Ayesha once commented that when women who wear the burka venture beyond the Muslim neighbourhoods they are often looked on with suspicion and that people think "perhaps she is a thief". It is, then, not just purdah but also communal tensions that impact the physical mobility of Muslim women. Movement beyond the city limits is rare. As with everything, though, there are exceptions

¹⁴² Four months and ten days.

Redefining Relations & Negotiating Boundaries

Gulshan, the character with whom I opened the discussion of female homeworkers in the previous chapter, was one of only two women we met who had experience of working outside Saharanpur. Gulshan's early trips out were with her husband to help sell goods in the local fairs of Allahabad and Lucknow. This came about, in part, due to her situation as a second wife. This position of lower status meant, that unlike with his first wife, there was little concern about her taking part in such trips. It was only following her divorce, however, that she made a trip to Kerala in search of work. Just as Carswell & De Neve (2012) describe women in Tamil Nadu accessing work and negotiating the terms of their employment through male relatives who could act as middlemen in the process, so Gulshan accessed work in a similar way. However, unlike Carswell & De Neve's (ibid) textile workers, Gulshan did not have a readymade network to rely on. Instead she had to redefine the terms of her association with men who were not relatives. In order to do so, she utilised the notion of a 'fake brother', just as she had done with me when we first met and she declared "I can sit by him, he is like my brother"¹⁴³. This notion of the 'fake' or 'fictive brother' proved important in accessing work opportunities as well as being a simple 'redefinition'¹⁴⁴:

"I went out to sell pieces and into Allahabad and Lucknow at a fair [with my ex-husband]. In these fairs my husband went for sales so I went with him. There was a boy in Lucknow who called me khala (sister). Once he took me to a zoo. There were lots of birds and animals there. He always gave me great respect, but I always kept myself in veil so that boy told me 'I am like your brother, so don't hide yourself in a veil'. So in the zoo I made a brother.

After my divorce I went in Kerala as a worker. My sister's son was working there and when he saw that my husband divorced me and that I was in a bad situation - always going in a factory and sometimes in a school as a maid where I earned just 300rs pm - he realised that I was in trouble and said that I should go with him to Kerala for work. In Kerala there was a famous statement for Saharanpur people that the Saharanpur person never likes his wife to work in a factory. The Kerala people always laugh at the Saharanpur people. The factory owner was very good but the one thing is that there was a discipline of right time. We had to arrive at the right time every day. We always went in the morning at 7.30 but there was a tea break at 10am for 15mins and a lunch break from 1-2pm in the afternoon. Then again at 3.30

¹⁴³ See previous chapter.

¹⁴⁴ The story was told more than once in a series of interviews but has been edited and adapted here.

we had a tea break for 15mins. In this time we could go out of the factory and if our house is near then we could also go there, but at 6.30 the factory was closed and we would come back to our homes. On Saturday it closed at 5.30 as the Sunday was a holiday, we had a lot of facilities in Kerala.

Some ladies had relatives there but sometimes they went alone, in this case they had to make a fake brother so that they could get work. Some ladies made a chatta [Malayan for brother]. They did this as there was a rule that the lady could work only if she was with a relative. There were good conditions there for workers and lots of work, in Kerala I felt very happy. At the same time when I felt that everything is going smoothly there started a big problem for the children's education as there they speak Malayalam language not Urdu or Hindi and this we do not know. In Kerala education was very costly and in a month there was an 8000rs cost for all the children to have education. Then I decided to come back in Saharanpur as I felt that there was no future for my children in Kerala".

Gulshan's case is very much the exception rather than the rule. Although for Gulshan her engagement with work was born in part out of necessity, other women worked in the home alongside male relatives. This, too, was often bound up with questions of status and respectability. As Mustaqim, whose wife does not engage in wood work, explained "it is not good for my wife to work here in the home as it will not be good for the family. If I am working then my wife should not be as it is my duty for this". Mustaqim, himself, worked on a homework basis from time to time as do many other men and boys in the city. For men, too, there are a variety of structural, agentive and moral considerations to be negotiated in considering work in the home, in the factory and in the space between.

Conclusion

In this chapter the aim has been to look beyond the statistics (Brah, 1993) and delve into the complexity of working life among female workers as they negotiate spaces of home and factory in Saharanpur's wood carving industry. The highly gendered nature of production in Saharanpur means that, generally, there are only certain types of paid work available to women. An opening up of the space to include factories reveals that there is a degree of moral terrain to be negotiated, both within the home and factory

space. This is, in part at least, tied up with notions of *purdah*, *izzat* (respect), *sharafat* (honour) and character, these being packaged in the broader negotiation of *chal-chalan*. However, it is also worth heeding the warning of Hasan & Menon that ‘too much should not be made of cultural norms’. Indeed, the very notion of *chal-chalan* is not static in nature but is negotiated and re-negotiated in various settings. It is also worth noting that this is not exclusively ‘Muslim’. The very word *chal-chalan* is used within variety of communities in the north of the sub-continent. Pigg (1995) describes its use in Nepal where the notion of *chal-chalan*, here seen in terms of the ‘old’ values of hill villages, is contested, contrasted and renegotiated against ‘new’ values and manners associated with globalising influences. Jeffrey et al (2005) define it as “rooted in a person’s speech, dress and mien” and describe the ideal *chal-chalan* for young Chamar men as being reconfigured around ‘education’:

“Chamar *netas*¹⁴⁵ imagined educated young men travelling through and inhabiting traditional and modern spaces with ease, panache, purpose and style. In contrast, those without Hindi literacy, worldly knowledge and cultural distinction were perceived to be aimless, awkward and disorientated”.

(p.24-25)

So notions of *chal-chalan* are, then, in flux as they come into contact with processes of globalisation, global capitalism and industrial production. In the factories, too, there is a sense of flux. The workforce is by no means unified, with factory workers divided across lines of gender, identity and religion. However, here, too, these identities are open to redefinition as workers find, even if only occasionally, common purpose and consciousness. The expected characteristics and ‘*chal-chalan*’ of the ‘ideal’ female worker embodying “traits like docility, dexterity and obedience” (Scrase, 2003; p.451) are also open to re-negotiation and, although they can at times be reinforced, they can be reinterpreted as supposedly fixed moralities and altered through discourses amongst female workers. We have also seen how relationships with others in the supply chain are different for men and women. This is particularly stark in the case of relations with male *thēkēdārs*. For men these relations are often bound up in notions of friendship and neighbourhood affiliation. For women, however, the absence of such facets not

¹⁴⁵ Leader – usually used in the political context.

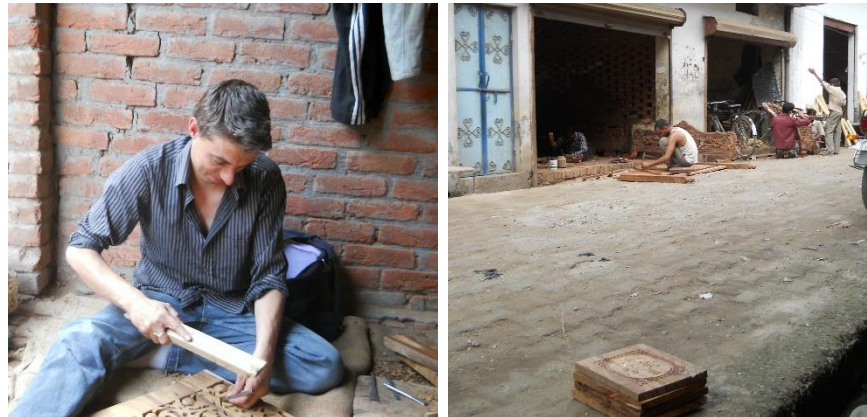
only creates distance but also increases vulnerability to unscrupulous practices in relationships where there is little additional obligation to build trust upon. From here the thesis moves back to these male-dominated realms of sociality and work and away from distinctions of home work versus factory work. Instead, I focus on the city's gullies where most of the ethnographic research took place. These spaces are very much male-dominated. Whilst I sought ways of structuring this thesis to deal with men and women in a more intertwined way, the highly gendered nature of the production environment and the differing methodologies that were required to engage with each made this problematic. However, dealing with men and women separately, in fact, provides a better sense of the segregated nature of their work and life worlds.



Just outside Ali Ki Chungi

Interval One

Kamil Wali Gully: Work as Method



Learning some basic carving with Mustaqim & the view from Arshad's shop

Thus far I have focused on giving the reader a sense of the industry as a whole. The initial section 'Journeys In' has presented an image of the way in which supply chains and historical vectors factor in the forming of the city and its labour force. In the previous chapter I have aimed to situate female woodworkers within this dynamic and to account for the gendered nature of production. Throughout the remaining chapters, however, I move away from contextualising the industry as a whole and the variety of localities therein. Instead, I shift the focus to one particular locality, Kamil Wali Gully, where the majority of the fieldwork was spent and where I served my apprenticeship. With women being distinctly absent from these highly public spaces of labour, this inevitably involves an emphasis on male workers. In particular, the remainder of this thesis revolves around those individuals introduced in the prologue. Whilst embedded in a single gully, it was from here that workers such as Sajid, Mustaqim¹⁴⁶, and others, began migrations further afield. Understanding the complexity of this particular locality, then, is critical to understanding the ways in which migrant connections are created. In

¹⁴⁶ See Prologue for family details etc.

order to introduce the scene I begin with a description of my own experience of learning to craft. This is then broadened out in the following chapter to a focus on the experience of others, who, unlike myself, were not ‘outsiders’, and on the ways in which apprenticeship is changing to meet the demands of global production.

Work on apprenticeship in craft settings has shown that it is not just about learning craft skills but also about the “acquisition of social knowledge, worldviews and moral principles that denote membership and status in the trade” (Marchand, 2008; p.246). Acquiring ‘social knowledge’ through work participation is, I argue, critical to accessing the types of social relations that are embodied in everyday work. It also provides the fieldworker with a sense of physical and mental rigours of labour (Prentice, 2008). Serving an apprenticeship affords a way of building links within the community, creating space for fermenting friendships and to be seen, to some degree, as a part of the fabric of work and life. Being a part of this fabric was a highly emotive experience. It led to the creation of bonds which, I hope, will be lifelong. Picking up from where the prologue left off, I begin with a description of learning brass overlay work in the shop of Mohammad Arshad. This allows for a contextualisation of embodied learning as a method and creates a description of the forming of a friendship in the field.

‘Mullah Ji’ trains a Shagrid

Arshad became not just an informant and friend but also my *ustad*. I could see pleasure, and slight amusement, in his eyes each time I addressed him as such. Although brass overlay work had been deskilled (following the introduction of pre-cut brass) and looked to be a modest undertaking, I soon realised I had much to learn. Initially I was allowed only to carry out simple tasks. Arshad drilled holes in the brass shapes, cut tacks from brass wire, laid out the design and hammered a tack lightly into each hole, just enough to grip the wood underneath. Gripping them with tweezers, I then nailed the tacks into the wood with a small hammer. Even this humble job proved difficult. The thin wire tacks were fragile. I bent many and had to pull them out and start again. Often the tacks required a small head. This was achieved by adjusting the hammer angle from side-to-side whilst tapping, hence spreading and flattening the top of the tack.

Initially I struggled and Arshad showed me items that had come back ruined from the buffer's shop. A lack of a head had led to the buffing machine ripping off the brass designs, meaning they had to be scrapped and started again. None was wasted, however. Bent tacks were returned to the pre-cut brass manufacturer where they could be traded for a discount off Arshad's next purchase. The size of the tack head was affected by the condition of the wood. If dry, the head could be small, giving a smoother finish to the design, as the tack gripped naturally to the grain. Damp wood required a broader head as moisture lubricated the material allowing the tack to become extricated during buffing. Initially, I had to ask Arshad "*kya yah lakri gila ya suukh hai*"? (Is this wood wet or dry?). Slowly, however, I started to get a feel for the material, to understand the subtle differences in texture and appearance, depending on moisture level.

It was not just technique that I struggled with. My body did not adapt well to long hours of sitting and working. The shop was small and we sat opposite each other on the stone floor covered only with a thin hemp sack. We removed our shoes and used our toes and feet to steady more awkward pieces of wood. I found I often shifted position and by the end of the day my lower back was screaming. I was reminded of a story told by an old friend, a tailor from Mussoorie¹⁴⁷. As a boy his father started to teach him the work. For weeks he sat in the shop only watching what his father did. His mother complained that this was a waste of time and that, if he was not working, he should do something else. However, his father explained that he was learning the most important skill... to sit. I told this story to Arshad and explained that, as a boy, I never learnt 'to sit'. He chuckled and reminded me, each time I stood up groaning, that it would have been a good thing to learn this.

It was a couple of months before I was allowed to do anything more complicated. I was pleased when Arshad presented me with a board of wood, upon which brass shapes were laid out, and a hand drill. Here, too, my touch proved heavy. I often made the holes too big, meaning that the tacks would not hold. Frequently, the bit stuck during

¹⁴⁷ A hill town about four hours' drive away.

drilling, rotating the brass. Patiently, Arshad showed me how to approach this with a combination of speed, to avoid sticking, and delicacy, to avoid oversized holes. It was longer still, before I was introduced to the most difficult stage of brass overlay work. Designs were composed of floral or abstract shapes. These ended in curved brass leaves with an engraved stem pattern. This comprised of three scores starting together at the base and opening out towards the tip. We undertook this with a fine tipped chisel. The brass leaves were delicate and my fear of damaging them resulted in the grooves being barely visible. Arshad encouraged me to apply force. Often I punctured through the brass but slowly I started to get the weighting of each blow. The grooves had slightly rough edges and I compulsively attempted to brush the stray shards with my finger. Arshad quickly stayed my hand, explaining that the shards could become embedded in the skin and that they would disappear during the buffing.

As our friendship grew we spent more time together away from work. I often went to Arshad's home and was introduced to his parents, brothers, wife and three children. His father, who made sweet wrappers, smoked *beedies* (cheap cigarettes) and talked through missing teeth, making understanding him hard. Arshad's mother was highly visible in the home space. She greeted me warmly each time, placing her hand on my head by way of blessing. The other women remained mostly in the *sehan* (courtyard) where food was prepared and household chores completed. Arshad and I usually sat together in a rear bedroom. The younger women averted their gaze as I passed through the communal space. On one occasion I was sat alone while Arshad was at *namaaz*. His mother entered and requested that I help repair a music player. I followed her to the next room where the women were. They giggled and asked me questions while I fiddled haphazardly with the machine. I got the feeling that the broken machine was being used as an opportunity for them to get a look at me. I felt uncertain if I was supposed to be in the space and averted my gaze before exiting. I did not mention it to Arshad but a few days later he asked if I thought the machine could be fixed. The more I got to know the family the more some of the curtains fell as relations became increasingly informal.

Although familiarity allowed a degree of informality, Arshad was diligent in his religious practice. He always made time for *namaaz* and sometimes I joined him. As well as

completing *namaaz*, Arshad wore the *kurta* (light cotton clothing) and did not shave his beard. As our friendship grew, Arshad occasionally expressed his concern regarding my lack of religion. He never did so out of a desire to convert me, or for his own satisfaction, but through a genuine concern that his close friend may not join him in the afterlife:

“The Quran is the word of god but you are my best friend. I do not give you any pressure but you should investigate. Let’s go in jamaat and there some foreigners can explain to you. They came because they believe in Allah. Many people convert to Islam as they get an idea about Allah’s power. I am very much worried about you that you will burn in fire if you have no faith. Tom, you are my best friend and I do not want to see you in the fire. [...] I never want to convert you but I am telling you this as you are my best friend”.

Arshad was also keen to school me in other aspects of Islamic and cultural practice and became a cultural as well as a craft *ustad*. I discussed the possibility of my joining him for *namaaz*. Arshad instructed me on the correct procedure for *vazu*¹⁴⁸ and when we attended he prayed next to me ensuring that I followed his movements. Whilst some of his tuition was orientated toward formal occasions there were also numerous smaller adaptations that he encouraged me to make. This could be simply correcting my cultural stumbling but were amplified by his position as a member of the *Tabligh Jamaat*. He also made suggestions as to those individuals I should associate with. In some workshops, however, social life revolved around hanging out, drinking alcohol and, at times, frequenting prostitutes. Here, the lessons I would have learned would have been very different. As I became closer to Arshad, Mustaqim, Sajid and others I became conscious of my reputation within the group. As such, when an opportunity arose to go drinking with guys from a neighbouring workshop, I found myself declining. Although the building of friendships had opened some doors it also led to the closing of others.

Intense friendships were something that I experienced increasingly through my time in the city and still, at a distance, today. This was partly a result of my positionality and being a ‘guest’ laid certain obligations on my hosts. However, the notions explored here are relevant to understanding social relations in the gullies and friendships amongst

¹⁴⁸ Procedure for washing correctly (particularly prior to prayers).

others were also intense. As I prepared to leave, Mustaqim was keen to confirm that his family had treated me ‘with the same love’ as they did their sons and that we would remain friends. These events took place as I was leaving the field but the friendships built during my time in Saharanpur persist as we continue to converse by telephone. This represents something of a shift in the contemporary experience of undertaking fieldwork, particularly, when method is based on forming close relationships. Such on-going relations would have been impossible only a decade ago. But in a world of global communication, they can be maintained. This opens up new considerations as we strive to achieve a degree of critical reflection, a process that is already difficult given the time spent internalising the worldviews of others (Prentice, 2008). It also blurs the line between home and field. Waiting for a flight to Dubai I had a last phone conversation with Arshad. As I said goodbye he responded in English with ‘I love you’¹⁴⁹.



Brass Overlay prior to buffing & on Completed Furniture

¹⁴⁹ In the context of these relationships the meaning is translated by Arshad from Hindi/Urdu and should not be misinterpreted.

Chapter Five

From Apprentice (Shagrid) to Master (Ustad): Learning to Craft



Young Apprentices at Work

“[Apprenticeship] represents a mutually beneficial relationship between 'ustads' and their 'shagrids'. [...] due to the very nature of work most 'ustads' need 'shagrids' to undertake minor tasks. They cannot employ full-time workers to perform such minor work. On the other hand, 'shagrids' benefit from this system by acquiring skills which help them in setting up their independent business or in raising their future wages”.

(Burki & Ghayur, 1989; p.919)

In her short story ‘The Carpenter’s Apprentice’, Monisha Mukundan (1999)¹⁵⁰ tells the tale of Mohammad, a young boy who is about to start the day where his ustad will allow him to undertake his first wooden join on the building scaffold where they labour. That morning Mohammad’s friends come to take him to an elephant fight. When he says he cannot join the festivities they taunt him. His friends work as stone masons and scoff at the temporality of the scaffold, derisively telling him that the stone flowers they fashion will stand for eternity. His master, Ustad Pira, overhears the conversation. Later he moves to reassure Mohammad telling him: “Every bit of work is important. If we didn’t

¹⁵⁰ Fictional account.

build the scaffolding, in the best way we can, there would be no building, no base for marble decorations. We helped to lay the foundations of the building, and the building rises only because we are here" (p.32). Mohammad's downtrodden spirit is revived and the story concludes with an emphasis on the affection he feels for his ustad as he takes his tools and, surrounded by the carpenters, declares "I'm ready"!

Mukundan's story reflects classic notions of master-apprentice relationships (as with Burki & Ghayur, 1989). The *ustad* acts as protector, patron and teacher. The *shagrid* gives respect, affection and, once sufficiently trained, his labour. Whilst often conceived as informal education and contrasted to formal education systems (Chopra & Jeffery, 2005; Simpson, 2006; Herzfeld, 2004; Ingold, 2000), the relationship between master and apprentice is highly formalised. Simpson (2006) identifies three primary features in the literature on apprenticeship. First, there are effective forms of education beyond formal schooling. Second, knowledge is tacitly embodied and not a process of consumption for mind alone. Third, apprenticeship is a part of processes of social and hierarchical reproduction. Marchand (2008) argues, apprenticeship is not just about learning but about structuring "the practitioner's hard-earned acquisition of social knowledge, worldviews and moral principles that donate membership and status in the trade" (p.246). Or, as Herzfeld (2004) puts it, apprenticeships are served in a 'total social context' that involves creation of persona as well as impartment of skills. However, apprenticeship is not a static form of labour force or social reproduction. Market pressures for ever-increasing quantities of cheap goods have strained the old system. Likewise, a focus on 'youth' as embodying the adaptability and status of the neoliberal age has created altered relations of status which shift away from age and experience and instead forward youth and adaptability (van Dijk et al, 2011).

This chapter focuses on change and continuity in the *ustad-shagrid* system in Saharanpur and argues that the *ustad-shagrid* relationship exists within a changing dynamic. Changes result from increased pressure from global markets for higher levels of productivity. This has led to increasing demand for labour and hence levels of recruitment that longer periods of apprenticeship, seen more in the past, struggle to keep up with. Likewise a demand for speed, rather than quality, has also impacted on

the way in which apprentices are trained. These factors, however, also coincide with changing attitudes and social status occurring within the craft working population. This has seen a decline given to experience and age in favour of the energy of youth and the seeking of faster routes to becoming economically productive. In this context I initially explore the trajectories and connections that bring people into the industry. These include kin, family and apprenticeship-based pathways. They involve interlocking relations with associated forms of status and obligation which overlap in various ways. Following this I unpack the ways in which apprenticeship is changing as a result of market pressures and other local restructuring. Finally, I examine how apprentices themselves negotiate the expectations of the *ustad-shagird* system. Before beginning, however, I further explore the literature on apprenticeship and learning in order to situate my analysis.

Marchand (2010) conceptualises apprenticeship in terms of mimesis¹⁵¹. Here, skills and practices of a craft are passed to the next generation through experiential techniques that often involve little vocal instruction but observation, mimicry or trial and error, a process Marchand argues must be considered in “direct relation to the changing social and physical worlds in which bodies act, and act upon” (p.256). This notion of learning through mimesis differs somewhat from ‘phenomenological’ approaches (Ingold, 2000). For Ingold meaning and knowledge are bound up with imitation and mimicry. Mimesis, however, focuses on transmission of ‘experiential truth’ with cultural meaning being communicated linguistically (Gieser, 2008). Although important in contextualising the scene, the philosophical nature of this work presents problems in terms of remaining relevant to apprentices themselves. Although writing in a similar vein, Simpson (2006) notes that such lines of questioning are met by silence on the shop floor:

“[When] this literature turns to make broader claims based on its ethnography I find that either I have to leave my informants behind in order to follow the debates or, alternatively, have to dismiss my informants’ knowledge as relative when held up against the claims for universality embodied by much of the literature”

¹⁵¹ Mimesis, as deployed by Marchand (2010), draws on Plato and Aristotle who saw mimesis as the mimicking of nature.

(p.163)

The focus here, then, is on descriptive narrative. I draw out empirical rather than philosophical elements present in the aforementioned literature in constructing a comparative framework. By doing so I hope that informants and friends are not 'left behind' (ibid). However, there are aspects of this literature that provide important discussion which reflects the framework of the thesis. Firstly, the relationship between Islamic forms of learning and apprenticeship requires some unpacking. Although the master-apprentice relationship exists across the world, Dilly (1999) draws parallels between its use in Muslim societies and the repetitive learning utilised in Quranic schools. Marchand (1999) compares the process to 'learning without understanding', to that of children reciting The Quran without understanding the words¹⁵². For Marchand the completion of an apprenticeship represents a move from a state of faith and understanding (*iman*) to a condition of intentionality (*ishan*) when "thoughts and actions [become] absorbed with the drive to reproduce the 'beauty' of the craft over which he has acquired mastery" (p.109). Secondly, this literature helps us to understand relationships between emotion and labour. As Gieser (2008) elaborates:

"The literature [...] clearly shows that emotions are integral to the learning process and are usually described in the context of novice-teacher relationships. Novices do often tend to have feelings of shame, insecurity, nervousness, fear of failure, or pride and happiness. Teachers are often known for their displayed feelings of displeasure, sometimes even hostility, anger, or pride and happiness".

(p.306)

The role of ustads in contemporary supply chains is complex. Dilly (1999), for example, describes a weaving master in Senegal spending "most of his time hawking finished cloth around the traders at the market [...] apprentices were guided by an elderly client weaver and a fully trained young man" (p. 41). In other words, the master was more of an employer whose first concern was with securing business deals and the wheeling and dealing of the bazaar, with training of new staff being subcontracted to other employees

¹⁵² This is common in India where Hindi and Urdu forms the communicative language. The Arabic of The Quran is understood by few of those who recite it yet there remains a great deal of meaning that is communicated through its repetition.

who saw no financial gain from the arrangement. The master weavers, Dilly suggests, utilised networks of obligation, generated through training apprentices, to increase spheres of influence within the marketplace. Apprenticeship also represents a guarded realm of knowledge that may be protected by caste, clan, guild, *biraderi* or other groups (ibid). Simpson (2006), in his work on shipyards in Gujarat, focuses not just on mutual relationships but on the ‘drama of apprenticeship’ and the violence therein. Simpson critiques the notion that apprenticeship is primarily about learning. Instead, he argues that profit motives drove many *ustads* and that for apprentices it was often a ‘means to other ends’ such as foreign adventure or personal advancement.

Simpson (2006) highlights how early experiences of apprenticeship are as much about humiliation and being the ‘butt of every joke’ as about learning. However, he also acknowledges affective aspects of apprenticeship. Simpson includes ways in which notions of religious reformism permeate *ustad-shagird* relations and how apprenticeship inaugurates individuals into nuances of “language and the gestures of language through which friendship and camaraderie are communicated” (ibid; p.66). In this sense apprenticeship is also about “cycles of exchange” between different actors within the industry. This also plays out in Saharanpur. However, both the pressure of supply chains and apprentices themselves are active in (re-)shaping the terrain. Here there is resonance with recent work by Herzfeld (2004). For Herzfeld the master-apprentice relationship is much more fractured, emanating from reconfigurations and pressures of global markets as well as changing status and identity. For Herzfeld apprenticeship is a process intersected not just by learning but also by stealing of designs, ideas and customers (see also: Meagher, 2006). This line between learning and theft is a hazy one and is intersected by changing status and market forces which alter the types of individuals entering the trade (Herzfeld, 2004). It is with this complexity in mind that I turn to apprenticeship in the gullies.

Apprenticeship in Kamil Wali Gully

As with many craft industries, apprenticeships in Saharanpur are overlapped by kin, family and other affiliations. In Kamil Wali Gully, as elsewhere in Saharanpur,

apprentices were numerous. Some were young boys, some in their late teens. Some were taught by considerably older masters and others by those of similar age. Most started with simple jobs... fetching tea, sweeping away wood shavings and running errands. Some spent the whole day in the workshop, earning little more than tea and lunch. Others came after school. Arshad's young nephew often joined us in this way. His apprenticeship was not of a formal nature. Indeed, in some ways it was not an apprenticeship at all. He earned a little pocket money and enabled his uncle to complete orders when demand was high. However, he showed little enthusiasm for the work and often sought ways out of his obligation. A favourite trick was to convince his uncle to let him run some errand or other and stretch out the time away. Arshad was tolerant of his behaviour and recognised that the work was little more than 'time pass' for the boy. Indeed, Arshad saw little future in brass overlay work so was not keen to fully train family members.

Across the gully was the carving shop of Nafees, Wasim, Imran and his brother Monis. Here three apprentices were employed. The high level of skill involved meant that all three expected lengthy apprenticeships. The four men were strict but nurturing with the boys. Mistakes were made. On one occasion the youngest of the apprentices, Imran, allowed his chisel to slip and blunt on the stone floor. Wasim was angered and gave him a clout around the head. The boy was upset and continued work with tears welling in his eyes which, in spite of his best efforts, occasionally fell onto the partly carved wood. At day's end, however, Wasim put an arm round his shoulders and joked "the problem is your brain is blunt like this chisel" and with an affectionate squeeze added "don't worry we will make it sharp". Next door to Arshad's shop was a workshop occupied by five young men. Brash, rude and bantering, these were not the mild-mannered and diligent craftsmen across the gully. Here, too, there was an apprentice. However, Shamshad was not a demure boy. A friend of Shanawas, the two were of similar age. Although Shanawas was technically his ustad, the relationship between the two was unlike that in Mukundan's short story. Upon asking how the arrangement worked Shanawas replied 'yes I am his ustad, it means I can fuck him whenever I want'. Shamshad was quick to respond, 'if he could only get his cock to work'.

These contrasting engagements reflect the variety of learning arrangements. They may involve formal relationships or more informal approaches where mates train mates. Environments where the ustad-shagrid system operates vary, creating additional layers to the relationship. The person of the ustad may take differing forms. The ustad may himself be an employee and in turn employ a shagrid. As Abdul, a workshop owner in a neighbouring gully, describes: “I give the artisan who works for me [in my workshop] a piece-rate and he employs other people from that money under the ustad system. In this way I do not have to worry about the training”¹⁵³. With payments often made on piece rate, the artisan is able to improve his own earning through training a shagrid (as with: Dilly, 1999). At times ustads leave the training to experienced workers in their employ¹⁵⁴ or double as thēkēdārs, a practice common in larger factories. In the context of Saharanpur, then, the definition of what it is to be an ustad or a shagrid is fluid and does not simply reside in ‘classical’ conceptions of apprentice and master. Bearing this in mind, however, the majority of artisans and workers in the city’s gullies have learnt their trade through the ustad-shagrid system (Table 1) in some form or another.

Table 5.1: How respondents learnt their trades (%)¹⁵⁵

Method of training	Ustad-Shagrid System	From Family Member	No Formal Training	Through institute/college ¹⁵⁶	Other
% Worker/artisan	71.4	19.9	7.5	0.4	0.8

There were formal training centres for woodwork. In particular the local government-run seasoning plant. However, attendance was low. Likewise the *Jāmi‘ah-yi Maṣāhir-i ‘Ulūm-I*, the main madrasa, offered training courses for a period. These were intended to allow graduates to work in villages and spread the *ulama* through participation in trades. However, they were soon dropped as students saw woodworking as low status

¹⁵³ Although this allowed him to pass responsibility, he complained “...if the labour inspector comes then I explain this [that he is not the employer] but still he fines me [for employing child labour]”.

¹⁵⁴ Although some craftsmen work alone, many are also employers with 66% of those surveyed having at least one *shagrid* or employee. Some, although still involved in handwork themselves, employed relatively large numbers.

¹⁵⁵ Source: Fieldwork.

compared to Quranic study (Metcalf, 1978). In what follows, I utilise the stories of three close informants and others to highlight this variety and to delve into views of formal and informal learning. Here I begin with Mustaqim Ansari and his sons.

Mustaqim's Story: Education, Ustads & Shagrids

The variety of trajectories into the wood industry are illuminating not just in terms of understanding how people enter the industry, but also in revealing structural constraints that reduce the availability of alternative options (i.e. Jeffrey et al, 2008). Mustaqim Ansari followed the 'traditional' route into the industry. Here he describes how he began under an *ustad* who, having left the industry, now runs a small *paan* (betelnut)¹⁵⁷ stall close to Mustaqim's home.

"I went to the paan walla you can see near my house. I went in his shop. At that time he worked in this business. When I started to learn this work I first took only tea and water. I never got any salary; I was just a spot boy¹⁵⁸. I was 12 or 14 years old. When I was learning my master only called me to bring tea and nothing else but after two years he gave me some tools and started to teach me the work.

[My ustad's work] came from Mukya¹⁵⁹ ji. He was a construction contractor. That contractor took the wood from the Mandi and made it in his place. My ustad took all his work from this contractor who sent all the work outside Saharanpur.

My ustad made some bail¹⁶⁰, they were small bails as the double bed was not in fashion and there was no sofa. At that time people were simple and had no idea about sofas and double beds, they could never imagine about this furniture. Only in Khatakheri did this first come. Khatakheri is the centre for modern furniture.

I thought only that one day I will be perfect in this work. At that time we could find 2rs in a week but some years later I could find 90rs in 1 month, then 120, then 150 but finally it became 250rs in a week. That was my salary when I started but after reaching 250rs [as a worker] I started my own work. Then I could earn 20-25rs per day but it was my own work".

¹⁵⁷ A stimulant blended from betel, areca nut and tobacco. It is chewed.

¹⁵⁸ A phrase borrowed from the (in this case Bollywood) film industry. The boy who operates the spot light being the lowliest employee on a movie shoot and having a reputation for often being harshly treated.

¹⁵⁹ Meaning chief or principal. In this case it refers to a village leader ('ji' is added for respect).

¹⁶⁰ Furniture trim.

Although Mustaqim's trajectory into the industry followed a familiar path from apprentice to journeyman to artisan, the environment in which he and his ustad worked illustrated the complex ways in which the ustad-shagird arrangement was incorporated into supply chains, layers of outsourcing and forms of wealth extraction.

Mustaqim relied on family to provide labour for the business and worked with four of his five sons, who ranged from seven to seventeen years. All were capable and the oldest, Javid, was already a skilled craftsman. Mustaqim also sent them to a local madrasa. For Mustaqim this formed an important part of shaping of the boys. Mustaqim felt capable of training his sons in the trade and providing them with skills and discipline. He explained, in order for them to become '*sharif*'¹⁶¹ (honourable), this secondary education was essential. For Mustaqim the notion of becoming a craft worker and of crafting a 'good Muslim' went hand in hand (see also: Mohsini, 2010). Mustaqim's eldest son, Javid, began work due to a sudden paralysis in his father's arm:

My father always worked outside Saharanpur. Do you know about paralysis? My father has this problem in his hand. Suddenly it became useless and there was no movement. Due to this tragedy I left my study. At that time I was just 10 years old. I started this work making *mudha* (stools).

It was near my house. After I left the study I started to learn this work for one month with an ustad. He was my first ustad. Then my father recovered some movement in his arm so I started work with my father. Since then I am continuously working with my father. Then we started some work from outside of Saharanpur. It was labour work that came from small factories.

Mustaqim did not favour sending the boys to school stating that, aside from religious scholarship, to learn the work provided the best chance for their future. In any case, he explained, there were no schools in the neighbourhood and it would be costly. Mustaqim's view was borne out by others. In a neighbouring gully I met another family of woodcarvers. Their business was somewhat bigger than Mustaqim's. The sons had completed secondary school¹⁶² and obtained diplomas from local institutions. However,

¹⁶¹ Meaning noble, honourable, highborn or eminent. It has connotations tied to the idea of an Ashraf lineage but is used in Saharanpur to describe someone of good character.

¹⁶² Secondary School

they were now back in the wood industry and sat working the tools in the same way as their neighbours. The eldest son, Faisal, explained:

“I did a computer course in software. Now, though, I do not remember how to do those things so I could not change to that work. When I finished the course I tried to get work in the company line in Saharanpur but there were no jobs. Others have had a similar experience. I don't mind having to go back to the wood line, both types of work are good and this is my own work. The money for the course was not wasted for me as I can use the skills in my daily life and to help our business. After not getting a job I went to Chennai for some time to do woodwork. Now I am working here again with my family”.

Whilst Faisal was philosophical about the situation, his father, Mehboob, was somewhat more pointed. He complained that the money he invested in higher education saw little return, in spite of grand promises made by the private local institutions.

Jeffery et al (2004) discuss the value of education in greater detail. Focusing on two marginalised groups, Muslims and Chamars, they deal with increasing access to education in the context of decreased employment opportunities for a newly educated youth. They suggest that gains from education are not just about obtaining work but are also tied up with notions of status and development. This encourages young men to “fasten onto conceptions of transformation through education” (p.975-976). Focusing on rural areas they argue that, as with Faisal, “Muslim young men have been more capable [...] of managing contradictions in narratives of educated distinction, as evident in their pragmatic attitude toward failing to obtain salaried work” (p.975). In urban Saharanpur, however, education is not the only driver. Among Saharanpur's woodworkers notions of building one's own business and doing 'apna kam' remain a powerful influences over decisions on education. For example, Mustaqim's decision making is tied up with improving the family's economic position. Faisal's appraisal of failing to 'escape' the industry is balanced by his view that his education helps build the family business.

Arshad's Story: Patronage & Friendship

Arshad did see value in formal education. He opted to send his six-year-old son, Saud, to school and intended to do the same for his further two children. However, he was realistic about potential opportunities stating that he hoped that his son might become a '*mistr*' (tradesperson)¹⁶³, perhaps a mechanic. These 'new trades' Arshad saw as having more longevity and potential than craft work. Arshad himself had relatively little schooling and started as a *shagrid* at the age of fourteen. However, rather than committing to one skill, he tried several before settling on his current position:

"When I was growing up I thought that I cannot study more so I should start working. There was no benefit to time pass, so work was necessary. I went for work making ladies' heels. In this work there was much dust and it was harmful for lungs so my family told me to stop. Then I started buff work but also there were problems with dust. After one year I stopped. Then I started the brass work on wood. My ustad, Islam, gave me 10rs for this work. He taught me the brass work for many years. It took five to six years. All the work was done by hand. First we made some tikai design on the wood then we fill it. Now though it is very easy work, now if anyone wants to learn he can learn in a month. Now we can complete a sofa in a few days but at that time it took 1-2 months as all work was done by hand. My ustad took a large sheet of brass and we made designs on it. At least five people were necessary for this. One made the design and the other was cutting. Two to three would fix the brass onto wood. Now, though, I can do this work alone as I can buy brass ready-cut. First I fixed some keel and then after this we would shape the brass after it had been cut. We called this process 'band'. Then slowly I started some cutting work.

At that time we were five boys learning with the ustad. There was also the ustad's brother. After some time he built his shop separately. Then he called me to come to his shop for work so I changed my job and stopped the work with the ustad. My ustad gave me 1500rs but his brother offered me 2000rs. When I was working with him I was cutting the patterns. I made a rule that I would give 150rs for my home and silently save 500rs to start my own work. After this I made my own shop in my mohalla. At that time I had everything and completed it all in my shop. Then my ustad came and shouted at me 'What are you doing?' 'It is not good! 'Come at my shop'! He was angry as

¹⁶³ The term is usually applied to trades such as mechanics, electricians, builders and plumbers rather than artisans trades where the term *kārīgar* is used.

I knew every part of his business so he was fearful that I could compete with him in the business”¹⁶⁴.

The upset Arshad caused his ustad is not uncommon. Islam felt aggrieved that his training of Arshad had not resulted in expanded influence (Dilly, 1999), but instead he had created a competitor. Although initially angry, Islam soon forgave Arshad and the two remained firm friends. Their bond was based on affection but occasionally Islam would come to Arshad’s shop to work. The two men often visited each other unannounced and made occasional social trips out. The poaching of shagrids is not uncommon. This practice reflects that undertaken by thēkēdārs who attempt to lure away each other’s labour, at times even paying off advance money¹⁶⁵.

Arshad introduced me to other former ustads. Some he continued to address using the ustad title and others, such as Islam, with the less formal ‘*Bhai*’ (brother). The tradition of having a single ustad, with whom you train, had also altered. Just as Arshad trained under different ustads in different trades, so had others. There are certain structural factors at play here. The growth of production and the rapidly increasing labour force meant, not only that the labour force was relatively young, but also that ustad-shagrid systems were unable to keep up with demand. In addition, the changing position, status and income of trades meant that it was common for craft workers to switch occupations. Arshad himself, for example, spoke often of his desire to learn a new trade and move away from brass overlay.

The buffing work Arshad engaged in prior to moving to Islam’s shop provided a relationship with a former *ustad* that proved particularly useful. UP’s politics had, until shortly prior to fieldwork, been dominated by the Bahujan Samaj Party¹⁶⁶ and its charismatic leader Mayawati who gained a majority in 2007. During the course of fieldwork the situation changed. Elections were scheduled for spring of 2012. In the

¹⁶⁴ There are some parallels here with Prentice’s (2008) description of the way in which textile workers in Trinidad obtain skills and patterns from the textile factory where they work to use in their own business at home. A process she describes as ‘thieving a chance’.

¹⁶⁵ As described in chapter 3.

¹⁶⁶ Roughly translated as the ‘People in Majority Party’, its main support was from lower castes.

run-up streets of the city filled with convoys of vehicles and people proclaiming their support for various parties. The results saw the end of domination by the BSP and the election of Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi¹⁶⁷ Party. This pleased several of my friends who had felt isolated by the caste-based rhetoric of Mayawati and saw the Samajwadi party as more representative of the Muslim community. For Arshad, in particular, the election result had an effect. Shortly after the election it was decided that Arshad should go for tests on a heart condition in Delhi. He wanted to obtain a BPL¹⁶⁸ health-card¹⁶⁹ entitling a degree of free treatment. These are notoriously difficult to obtain as officials often ask for bribes. Arshad's former buffing ustad had become fairly high in the local Samajwadi party. After failing to obtain the card Arshad called him and he came in person to the office. After a couple of minutes of berating the local officials the card was quickly issued.

These events represented a complex series of overlapping factors. Firstly, there was a degree of clientism (see also: Jeffrey, 2002): Arshad's ustad had requested his vote and to encourage friends and kin to do likewise. However, Arshad's framing of the interaction was very much focused on the ustad relationship and the patronage therein. The obligation of the ustad to his *shagrid* remained in place beyond training. There was relative distance, yet when required the former ustad dropped other obligations and attended to Arshad's concerns. Jeffrey (2002) describes "dominant classes [being] able to act as "brokers" between poorer sections of the rural population and the state [and that] it is necessary to be attentive to how differently positioned agents attempt to insert themselves into patron-client networks" (p. 38). Here, however, there was little class divide. Instead, there were overlapping relations present. Some emanated from the investment each placed in the association (Elyachar, 2002), others from obligations surrounding ustad-shagrid relationships and finally from a patron-client relationship rooted in recruiting votes from sections of the community, something that is neither new in the Indian context (Mayer, 1966), nor in decline (Khan, 2005).

¹⁶⁷ Literally 'Socialist Party'

¹⁶⁸ Below Poverty Line.

¹⁶⁹ These below poverty line cards give some degree of access to free healthcare in government hospitals.

Shahid's Story: Connecting Minds

I first met Shahid whilst taking dinner at Arshad's house. Tall and slim with a chipped front tooth, Shahid was in his mid-twenties. Unlike most of the friends I met during fieldwork he had a good level of English and was keen to practice. Shahid was particularly driven to gain education through attending various institutions and worked hard to gain a variety of skills in the textile and wood industries. Shortly after my departure he found a job as an accountant in a local business, a job that paid little more than higher skilled woodwork, but of which he was proud due to its white collar status (see also: Jeffery et al, 2005). As I write this he has moved on again and now works as a driver in Saudi Arabia. Although no longer in the wood industry, he and his family had long made their livelihoods within woodworking trades. Shahid's childhood and young adult life had been dominated by woodwork. Although I knew him throughout fieldwork it was not until the trip a year later that we finally sat down to undertake a life story interview. Access to his house was via a narrow gully close to Arshad's family home. Indeed, Shahid occasionally visited Arshad via a rooftop route. As with numerous occasions on which we had sat in his home, we occupied the front room which provided access to the street. His younger sister brought us tea and biscuits prepared out of sight by his mother. We started with the history of his family and their origins in a nearby village. Then we moved on to his childhood, during which he had worked with his brother on buffing work. Eventually we came to the moment he started to learn carving work.

"I used to buff until I was 17 years old. Then I decided to learn the wood carving as I used to love that work. When someone talks about [carving work], then he talks very deeply. Other people think 'oh what an art' and 'how did he make it'. I used to think 'oh wow it is nice work' maybe I should try. Then I joined a teacher for wood carving. He used to study. He worked and studied. I used to go there at night after finishing my buffing work.

That ustad was younger than me, he was two years younger. My second ustad was only five years older. Due to this we could have good communication. If you are of same age then you can have good communication. If one is much older, then the mind will not connect. People used to learn for eight to ten years, but now the child comes and they give one year and then think that you have enough knowledge to do work. If I go to an older teacher so he will take five years minimum as he thinks

with his mind. So I joined the younger one as he knew that I will be able to finish quickly.

Then my ustad went to Mumbai. I had finished 10th and sometimes had a gap in my buffing work. Then my exam was about to come and I studied for some time. Then I started with the third carving ustad in Khatakheri. He was nice. He was a villager. He had good humanity in himself and he taught me as a brother. He was also 5 years older. I went for a full day and then would work at home. I used to work at home as I had responsibilities. But then the company my ustad worked for changed the rules for carving. The owner told the ustad that they should no longer have shagrids as he wanted to employ only directly.

So my teacher sent me to another company. Then we were two, me and my friend who had come from Saudi after working there. I had been sent there for a job as we had learnt as much as needed. There I was working for a *thēkēdār* not an ustad. We went there and we talked about our salary. It was necessary for us as we had learnt enough but it does not mean we will do this work all our lives”.

For Shahid a younger ustad represented a shorter journey to becoming economically productive. It also meant a less formal relationship where the two could quickly ‘connect’ better. Whilst high end skills are still valued, the market for domestic and export goods has become geared towards fast production. Hence there is less incentive to spending many years in pursuit of becoming a master craftsman.

Conclusion

Apprenticeship in Saharanpur has a variety of forms and layers. It provides a mode of labour control that is, in some ways, not so different from that of the *thēkēdār*. Yet the mode of ordered social reproduction that it once represented is being challenged. The demands of the supply chain has seen a progressively youthful workforce increasingly training itself. This is matched with a degree of deskilling. This is particularly so for exports where larger factories operate structures where *ustads* double as *thēkēdārs* and the carving process may be as simple as adding a few lines. Deskilling has added to the sense of decline among those of older generations. Yet there is still demand for high skilled areas such as the very fine *tikkai* work and longer processes of training are not altogether extinct.

Increasing demand and gradual shifts towards mass production play their part. However, Shahid's story highlights the desire of some workers to learn from someone of a similar age and, therefore, mind-set. The *ustad-shagrid* relationship exists, then, within a changing dynamic. It is also an important intersection in the creation of connections. *Ustads* and *shagrids* often retain a bond beyond the period of apprenticeship. This may be formal or based around patronage. It may become informalised and result in close and ongoing relationships. There are unspoken rules which *shagrids* must negotiate. Sometimes this results in frictions, such as Arshad's decision to go it alone. Often there remain ongoing connections between *ustads* and *shagrids* which may contain commitments of friendship, mutual support or patronage beyond the period of learning to craft. The incorporation of the *ustad* system into regimes of global supply has not taken place in a wholesale fashion. Instead, the *ustad-shagrid* system has seen its capacity stretched and its skill usurped. The old clustered niche that built upon long periods of learning has, to some degree at least, been replaced by a highly flexible system where apprentices readily 'jump ship' in line with market fluctuations and where the mobility, flexibility and increasing status of youth has created new forms of niche flexibility. In other words, in Saharanpur, even within what can largely be seen as an 'informal economy' informality as an economic reconfiguration has a variety of effects on labour arrangements and connections. In this case the *ustad-shagrid* relationship has itself become informalised, that is, less fixed, long term and standardised.

Relations between *ustads* and *shagrids* also involve the transferal of a variety of social norms and ways of being. However, we must be careful not to treat this as always being primarily about creating pious or religiously observant workers. For some *ustads* this is certainly a feature of their undertaking. Those who are observant or, such as Arshad, participate in *Tabligh* activities see the role of training a *shagrid* as also imparting religious ideals and practice. However, the relationship can be one of inauguration into other less salubrious activities and forms of knowledge. For some the *ustad* had been a connection to secret spaces such as places to drink alcohol or methods to find a woman for sex. The *ustad*, then, may inaugurate the *shagrid* into ways of being in the public realm involving displays of piety and respectful behaviour or they may be the facilitator

in opening up areas within a private realm of vice. Some literature on Islamic economics focuses on a 'shared commitment to Islam' as a means to access networks of business (i.e. Kuran, 2004). However, we must remain aware that there are other realms which overlap with economic activity which are defined through bonds formed in very different ways.

Finally, the stories presented over the course of this chapter show how the experience of apprenticeship can be an emotional one. Love and affection, jealousy and animosity, obligation and intimacy all play a part. There may be moments of anger and moments of respect. Whilst this may result in the breakdown of relationships, the emotional connection forged between *ustad* and *shagrid* may continue long after the apprenticeship is complete. This ongoing relationship creates obligations and opportunities for both parties. The *shagrid* may be expected to come to the aid of his *ustad* in times of illness or financial difficulty and likewise, as in the case of Arshad, the *ustad* may provide a mutual and ongoing source of assistance. This cannot be seen in instrumental terms alone but is also bound up in an economy of affection.



Mustaqim & three of his sons at the Ghul Fair

Chapter Six

From Craft Worker to *Jamaati*: Reformism, Personal Transformation & Work in the Gullies



Mohammad Arshad in his workshop and Saharanpur during Eid

Learning craft skills is not the only area couched in *ustad-shagrid* arrangements. The relationship between those seeking a path to religious renewal and those who act as their guides echoes that of the *ustad* and *shagrid*. It was early on during fieldwork that Arshad introduced me to his religious *ustad*, Mohammad Ilyas. As we set out for the masjid where he was based, Arshad said “now you will meet another *ustad*, but he is the most important *ustad* as he teaches about Islam”. When we arrived, the main prayer hall was empty with the exception of one teenage boy quietly reading Quranic text and going through his prostrations alone. Arshad led me up a narrow staircase to another large space. Crossing this we demurely entered a small room where Mohammad Ilyas was waiting. Softly spoken and with an ever-present knowing smile, the *ustad* beckoned us to join him. Surrounded by books, the cool room made a pleasant change from the heat and bustle of the city’s gullies. We chatted for some time with the conversation revolving around Arshad’s personal transformation and my own lack of faith. Mohammad Ilyas had a small group of followers, of whom Arshad was a peripheral member. The group looked to him for guidance on various aspects of life and practice. They accorded him deep respect, even extending to turning his shoes round when he

removed them before entering the masjid so that they would be ready for him to easily slip back into on departure. It was Mohammad Ilyas who had been fundamental in encouraging Arshad to participate in his first *Jamaat* five years earlier¹⁷⁰. For Arshad the guidance of this *ustad* had led to a re-crafting of his physical appearance and daily practice.

This chapter focuses on the ways in which the *Tabligh Jamaat* influences transformations in the individual, the economy and society more broadly. The primary focus for the former of these areas is the person of Mohammad Arshad. Here I emphasise the emotive nature of such transitions and the central importance that the individual takes within the movement's philosophy. After a rendition by Arshad of his own religious experience I then turn to the ways in which this interplays with production and work. Here I acknowledge the movement's emphasis on separation from worldly matters, particularly during *khuraj* (religious tour), although for *jamaatis* (Janson, 2014) and other observant Muslims (Kuran, 2004) there are also rules to be followed in the more mundane realm of the everyday. However, I also explore how workers themselves balance their twin obligations of being a *Jamaati* and providing for themselves and their families through craft production. I then broaden the scope to bring attention to other individuals. Finally, I expand this into thinking about the ways in which broader notions of reform and piety, of being a 'good Muslim' or a '*sharif aadmi*' (honourable man) interplay with work, business and production.

The Tabligh Jamaat in Saharanpur: A Brief Introduction

In Saharanpur's gullies, as in other Muslim neighbourhoods, the ways in which religious reform is orchestrated is changing. Whilst negotiation of reformism has long been a circulatory process (Feener & Sevea, 2009), the influence of Ashraf-dominated *ulamas* is being replaced by more informal forms of proselytization. A major contributor to this

¹⁷⁰ This chapter focuses primarily on the *Tabligh Jamaat*. However, it is critical not to give the impression that the majority of wood workers were involved. Indeed, most were not and it should therefore be seen as only one facet of a complex scene of production, labour relations, sociality and business. For Arshad and some others, however, it played an important part in their lives and participation was an emotive experience cross-cut by a sense of belonging, of being 'different' and of having a certain authority emanating from a *jamaati* identity.

is the emergence of the *Tabligh Jamaat*. The movement allows individuals to involve themselves according to economic means. As such *Jamaats* regularly set out from *masjids* in Saharanpur to nearby villages. These groups were not formed of scholars, but of labourers, farmers and artisans who took what time they could afford to participate for three days or longer. At the other end of the scale the city was visited by multinational *Jamaats*, consisting members from all over the world, including Africa, Europe, America and the Gulf. These groups generally started their journey from the large *markaz*¹⁷¹ at Nizimuddin in Delhi, where participants from different countries were placed together under an *Amir* (leader) and allocated routes to travel.

Only recently has scholarship giving attention to the *Tabligh Jamaat* emerged. This is surprising given its global reach and increasing impact within Muslim communities (Ali, 2003). It is also critical to understanding the lives of craft workers in Saharanpur where local and international *Jamaats* added additional layers of connections and circulations. The *Tabligh Jamaat* is just one of many reformist movements. Indeed, reformist Islam forms a complex tapestry, filled with contestations and negotiations within and between groups (Osella & Osella, 2013). Broadly, however, 'reformism' refers to "projects whose specific focus is the bringing into line of religious beliefs and practices with what are held to be the core foundations of Islam" (Osella & Osella, 2012; p.1).

Maulana Muhammad Ilyas¹⁷², the *Tabligh Jamaat's* founder, gave his devotion to the Deoband Madrassa prior to establishing the movement in the town of Mewat following his second hajj in 1926 (Ali, 2006). Its foundation was laid in a period during which various Hindu groups were seeking to 'reconvert' Muslims who had a Hindu lineage¹⁷³. Maulana Muhammad Ilyas felt that the madrassa system was too slow in challenging this and in driving reforming the masses (Ahmad, 1991). These concerns led to the *Tabligh Jamaat* taking a different approach to reformist work. Rather than religious authority being contained within the walls and scholarship of Madrassas, the *Tabligh Jamaat* sought to disseminate it among the masses by involving 'lay participants'

¹⁷¹ Centres from which *jamaats* depart, usually attached to a mosque.

¹⁷² Maulana Muhammad Ilyas also taught in Saharanpur Mazahirul Uloom seminary for a period.

¹⁷³ Primarily the Meos of Mewat.

(Metcalf, 2003). This is achieved by participation in *dawah* (missionary work)¹⁷⁴ and through the *khuruj* (religious tour)¹⁷⁵. The *khuruj* takes place over a period lasting three days, forty days or four months. It is, however, a forty day period that is considered ideal minimum for new initiates as it allows sufficient time to develop religious consciousness away from material and economic concerns or familial and local traditions (Ahmad, 1991). It is the purification of the participant, as well as preaching to other Muslims, which forms the primary purpose of the *khuruj* (Ali, 2006).

Stories of Change & Transition: A focus on the 'Individual'

In the opening of this thesis I laid out an approach that sought to focus on individuals and 'selfhood' alongside understanding collective identities and notions of communal belonging (Arnold & Blackburn, 2004). Here there are echoes with literature regarding the *Tabligh Jamaat*. The movement's notion that religious authority is born by each Muslim, irrespective of social standing, places responsibility on individuals to broaden their knowledge regarding Islam and share this with others (Ali, 2006; Metcalf, 2003). As Ahmad (1991) suggests "...the exclusive focus of attention of the *Tabligh Jamaat* is the individual. In the belief that an individual can sustain his moral character even in the context of a hostile social environment" (p.517). Robinson (1999) takes this further, arguing that this should be seen in terms of broader change among South Asian Muslims where "...a shift in the focus of Muslim piety from the next world to this one, [made reformist movements] increasingly aware that it was [autonomous individuals] who could act to create a just society on earth" (p.13). The principles upon which the *Tabligh Jamaat* is founded give a central role to notions of individual morality and behaviour, the obligation to teach others and the duty of each individual to be 'effective in the world' (Metcalf, 2003). For the *Tabligh Jamaat*, however, there is a great deal of emphasis given to the next world. Janson (2014), for example, cites a pious member of the movement in the Gambia stating "Life is a test, the hereafter is the best" (p.1).

¹⁷⁴ Is focused on practice among Muslims rather than conversation of others.

¹⁷⁵ Often referred to as a 'tour' but literally meaning sortie or patrol, this being drawn from language associated with the notion of Jihad (Metcalf, 2003). Structurally there are also similarities with certain aspects of Sufism, although the movement is not overly in favour of Sufi traditions (Robinson, 1999). As with Sufi structures, these groups are organised under the leadership of an Amir who will guide the group and organise its day-to-day running.

This is not to exclude its collective and communal aims. Certainly, a common identity and associated sense of belonging and comradeship were important aspects in drawing Arshad towards the movement. Writing on Southern Thailand, for example, Horstmann (2007) describes how the movement provides communal safety during periods of violence in the region. The apolitical nature of the *Jamaats* meant that they were tolerated by the state more willingly than other Islamic movements. However, Horstmann also suggests that communal markers, embodied in dress and practice, created distinctions between Muslims and other groups which were previously less clear. The global nature of the *Jamaat* also represents a change in the way in which Muslim communities perceive themselves in relation to those elsewhere in the world and redefines the boundaries around notions of friendship and kinship:

“In Southern Thai communities, foreigners from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan were traditionally perceived as strangers [...] who needed to be ritually incorporated and related to the community and their ancestors before they could become accepted members. The [*Tabligh Jamaat*], however, has introduced highly mobile *jamaats* from as far away as Jordan, and the locals thus become cosmopolitans overnight and call their Muslim guests (kheak) brothers who share the same beliefs. The local concept of kinship is extended on a global Muslim level, whereby Southern Thailand has become part of the [*Tabligh Jamaat's*] transnational Islamic landscape”.

(p. 126)

Personal stories, however, form an important part of the *Tabligh Jamaat* movement. Each person who participates in a *Jamaat* is expected to leave an account of their experience (either written or oral) with the *masjid* from which they set out. It is from these personal accounts that Metcalf (2003) draws to suggest that they iterate the desire of members to bring others into the fold of true Islam, with those who strayed often being seen as victims of other influences. Most importantly, however, she suggests that the stories show the “seriousness and importance Tablighis give to their work, coupled with the divine blessing they confidently expect for doing it” (p.142).

In daily life too, individuals initiate profound changes as a result of their engagement with the movement. Set against the background of the violent upheavals during and following the Gujarat riots of 2002, Jasani (2008) describes the story of Suhanaben. Following her initiation into the *Tabligh Jamaat*, she became increasingly conscious of

her piety. Not only did she seek to be modest in her daily practice and attend to her *namaaz*¹⁷⁶ but she also gave away her beauty salon, fearing it to be *haram*¹⁷⁷. Suhanaben went on to become highly active in counselling other women, both in terms of coping with the stress of daily life following forced relocations to ghetto areas and in terms of their Islamic observance.

The dramatic change that follows becoming a '*Jamaati*' impacts on the way in which individuals narrate their stories. Often laid out in terms of before and after 'conversion', although "...conversion does not refer here to the transition from one religion to another, but to the turning towards a new form of piety (Janson, 2006; p. 45). In addition, the presence of a tradition of archiving each individual's story at the end of a tour, emphasises how the movement itself contributes to the creation of a 'narrative culture' (Gardner, 2002), which interacts with other ways of telling present within the society of an individual's upbringing. It is against this background that I turn to Arshad's story in order to illustrate an individual's perspective on belonging to the *Tabligh Jamaat* and the personal significance and importance it can hold.

***Arshad's Story: Re-Crafting a Craft Worker*¹⁷⁸**

"I was different from other boys. We all went to other cities for enjoyment and ate chowmein. Then I grew up and came to my ustad [who taught me brass overlay work]. When I was with the ustad my friends became model style. They were rich and educated. They became a different type and did some wrong things. I was a namaazi boy¹⁷⁹ since my childhood. I wore jeans and t-shirt but I never left the namaaz. I played cricket and am fond of this. Some friends went every day to the cinema. They were also troubling girls and touching them. When I saw their bad habits I refused to go with them in public places.

After isha namaaz¹⁸⁰ and fajr namaaz¹⁸¹ everyday there was a special speech for the namaazi people in the masjid. Some special people like the mullah gave pressure on us to join the jamaat. They said that if we join then we

¹⁷⁶ Prayer undertaken five times daily.

¹⁷⁷ Against Islamic law.

¹⁷⁸ Aside from basic editing I have left this as Arshad told it. It was his request that I do so and the editing was done in consultation with him on a return trip.

¹⁷⁹ A boy who prays five times a day.

¹⁸⁰ Final evening prayer of five daily prayers.

¹⁸¹ First prayer of the day, performed early morning with sunrise.

will find heaven after death as the world is not for ever but eternal life is after death so they said that we should try for this. They also told me that I should follow the rules of Muhammad as this is Sunnah¹⁸². The jamaati people told me not to follow girls and not to watch movies [...] The jamaat told me to learn the rules of Islam, to go for namaaz and read the Quran. They offered that I should go in the Jamaat but I always rejected their proposal and said that I will go later as I have work. But one day I decided to go there and started to collect money for jamaat.

I collected 7000rs and gave 2000rs for my family and kept the other 5000rs. At that time my friend Mehboob was at my shop so I was not worried about my business. But if I were all alone in the shop then I could not go in the jamaat. [After the Jamaat] I kept a beard and started to wear kurta pyjama and left the jeans. [...] Before jamaat when I went to Mussoorie and Dehradun I had no idea about Islamic rule. I could watch ladies but now I know all about my Islam. I have changed my brain and my heart. If I go to Mussoorie and Dehradun I go for natural beauty, not ladies beauty. [...] You know in Saudi Arab, in Mecca and Medina all the ladies are in the veil and follow that rule very strictly but in Sahastra Dara¹⁸³ girls and boys would take a bath together but now it is shameful for me after jamaat.

Now I like the Islamic rule very much, I often go in the jamaat and hear the religious stories. I realise that this is our reality and life. Our namaaz and our Quran and our clothing should be fine according to Islam as these three things are our religion and also our life. I can give you one example, if I am an employee under any boss then I will do hard work there as he is my master so I should be loyal and honest for him as the job gives me an income. Our life is under Qayamat¹⁸⁴. A person can live 50-60 years in this world and after death there is no importance for worldly things.

When I go for the jamaat there is a head called 'Amir', he is like the military head of the jamaat. He makes all the rules and distributes the work. He told us who will make the food and who will wash the pots. He told us that two people should cook food and two others can learn the book. Once a jamaat came from Australia and the rules were the same for them. The Amir takes all the decisions for the jamaat work. He was a Mullah style person and very educated in the Islamic rules. He has a big crowd of followers in his *markkas*. [...] Once we went to Agra. He made all the rules in Agra and told us in which area we should go for the speech. He told us that in Agra we should go in a Muslim mohalla and to change people's minds so they follow the rules of Islam. Sometimes many Jamaat go in America and also in the UK, the jamaat goes in every part of the world and also they come in India from many parts of the world [...] In Kashmir, Mumbai, America and England, also in India the jamaat comes and goes. It is the circle".

¹⁸² Islamic way of life.

¹⁸³ A waterfall near Dehradun.

¹⁸⁴ Judgment day

The Tabligh Jamaat in Saharanpur

Just as Arshad had instructed me on daily practice¹⁸⁵, he made suggestions to others. Whilst Arshad's position workwise was low, being a '*jamaati*' allowed him to recover status on religious grounds¹⁸⁶. Early one Friday, following payers, Arshad, Sajid and I set off on my motorcycle to the *durgha* (Sufi shrine) at *Kiliyar*¹⁸⁷. The *durgha* was famous as a place of cleansing for those possessed by spirits and is popular with both Hindus and Muslims. 'Exorcisms' took place in the *sehan* (courtyard), which contained the tomb and a *masjid*. The process was dramatic. We watched a teenage Muslim girl with self-inflicted scars upon her arms convulse and writhe whilst close by a Hindu boy threw himself repeatedly to the ground screaming numerous curses. Upon *azan* (call to prayer) all the action ceased. Bodies were cleansed and calm prevailed as the crowd dispersed for *namaaz*. Arshad emphasised this as an example of the power of Allah, but also warned that some wrong practice occurs here. As we entered the tomb of Alauddin Sabir Kaliyari, Sajid opened his palms to begin praying. Arshad, however, was quick to stay his hand and explained that he should 'pray only to Allah'. With *namaaz*, too, Arshad was hesitant to join saying that there were mistakes. Instead he prayed a short while later with a few other men who also followed the Deobandi tradition.

In the locality of his workshop, too, Arshad encouraged others to join *namaaz*. Whilst some did, others met his call to '*namaaz paro*' (do your *namaaz*¹⁸⁸) with ambivalence, responding '*kam hai Bhai*' (there is work brother) or '*waqt nahi hai*' (there is no time). One afternoon in the second month of my apprenticeship Arshad asked me, in a concerned tone, what others said about him? I was unsure of his meaning. He explained that they might ask why I was sitting with him instead of in the other shops as he was not so educated. He enquired whether others referred to him as '*mullah*¹⁸⁹'. I shifted

¹⁸⁵ See Interval One

¹⁸⁶ The dual status of Arshad and others is not a situation exclusive to Saharanpur. Simpson (2006), for example, describes a reformation of economic and social status through the trope of reformist Islam in the shipyards of Gujarat.

¹⁸⁷ The *durgha* is dedicated to Alauddin Sabir Kaliyari a 13th century Sufi saint.

¹⁸⁸ The literal translation of '*paro*' is the instruction '*to read or study*', however the meaning here to the instruction '*to do*'. *Paro* is used rather than the *karo* (literally '*to do*') out of respect for the act of *namaaz*.

¹⁸⁹ A reference to the leader of a mosque but in this case used to denote someone who fancies himself as such but does not hold sufficient religious authority.

awkwardly as I had heard the term used, and in a disparaging way. Although I admitted this, I reassured him that most used the more respectful 'mullah ji'¹⁹⁰.

Responses to the *jamaats* varied between respect, ambivalence and mockery. This was intersected by the status and position of those interacting with the touring groups. Although Arshad had not worked outside, many woodworkers travelled across the country for employment¹⁹¹. On several occasions I joined Sajid, who had accompanied us to *Kiliyar*, on such trips. In Hyderabad we worked under three brothers whose father had relocated to the city from Saharanpur¹⁹². On one evening I was sitting outside the room where Sajid and I slept along with six others. I was joined by Shamshad, the youngest owner. A local *jamaat* arrived and entered the room. Once they were beyond the door Shamshad sniggered and within seconds his two brothers made their exit. Shamshad shouted after them '*kya hoa Bhai*' (what happened)? They laughed. Later Shamshad explained that the *jamaats* always said the same things and only wasted time. Although the owners left, the workers remained to listen patiently. Whilst some had a degree of interest, I knew that many were at best ambivalent. However, their status in relation to this *jamaat*, who originated from a masjid in Hyderabad and were well-educated and literate, meant they did not see leaving as an option.

Although Arshad was conscious of how his *jamaati* identity was seen by others, for him the *Tabligh Jamaat* held great importance. Arshad told me about his first *khuruj* four years previously. He had travelled for forty days, a trip that culminated with a large-scale meeting in Bijnor attended by thousands¹⁹³. For Arshad this was particularly special. He described the warmth and comradeship he felt and how he enjoyed the speeches. This sense of belonging extended beyond periods of *khuraj*. In spring of 2011 we travelled to Delhi as Arshad had heart problems. After completing checks at the hospital Arshad was keen to visit the *markaz* at Nizimmudin¹⁹⁴. As we travelled on the

¹⁹⁰ The addition of 'ji' denotes respect. The term is commonly used in Saharanpur as a descriptive for anyone who wears a beard and kurta irrespective of whether or not they are involved in the *Tabligh Jamaat*.

¹⁹¹ See chapters 8-9.

¹⁹² See chapter 8

¹⁹³ Large-scale meetings are now common across South Asia. Recent gatherings in Bangladesh have seen the largest coming together of Muslims anywhere in the world (excluding hajj) (Siddiqi, 2012) and the *Tabligh Jamaat* has attracted some of the largest congregations of Muslims in the US and Europe (Metcalf, 1996).

¹⁹⁴ A Muslim neighbourhood in central Delhi known for its Sufi shrine. It is also the sight of India's main *markaz*.

bus two Bangladeshi men boarded. They were carrying sleeping bags and small packs. This, along with their observant clothing, identified them as heading for *jamaat*. In spite of never having met Arshad, they immediately greeted him with '*asalaam alaikum*'¹⁹⁵ and a warm rapport was rapidly established.

The multinational nature of the movement also had an effect on Arshad's outlook. Unlike many of his friends, who had worked in others areas of India or the Gulf, Arshad had not travelled for jobs. His journeys had only been with the *jamaat*, with their duration restricted by his economic situation. The presence, however, of numerous *jamaats* passing through Saharanpur from across the world had given him a sense of cosmopolitan belonging. Early one evening Arshad called asking me to come to the *masjid* as an international *jamaat* had arrived. Upon entering we were thrilled to encounter our Bangladeshi friends from the bus. I visited the *jamaat* twice, on the first day with Arshad and on the second with our mutual friend Mustaqim. Chatting to several members of the group, who had travelled from Europe, Africa and elsewhere in Asia, I was struck by the different ways they proselytized. A German-born traveller of Turkish origin related his point in terms of his own transition. An East African based his argument in Holy Scripture, relating tales memorised from The Book, a reflection of his Quranic schooling. Whilst members came from numerous countries it was those from Saudi that impressed Arshad most:

"Before some years ago there was only one or two *jamaats* in India but now it has changed and in lakhs the *jamaats* go. There is no place in the world where the *jamaat* cannot go. Some time ago one *jamaat* came from Saudi in Khathakheri. I forgot [to tell you] otherwise you could meet them. All were Arab people and were very handsome and beautiful people [...]. If I am in Saudi then I cannot do any bad thing".

Now during Eid, Arshad, and some others who entered the *jamaati* line, dressed in what they termed 'Saudi style'¹⁹⁶. This consisted of a long *thawb* (gown)¹⁹⁷ and coloured

¹⁹⁵ Islamic greeting.

¹⁹⁶ Shifts in styles and dress in line with more pious notions of Islam has also featured in discussions elsewhere and play out in complex ways. Thangarajah (2003), for examples, describes how female migrants returning from Saudi Arabia adopted more pious forms of dress. This, however, was not a form of disempowerment but was actively used by women as a means of empowering themselves and increasing their standing (through increased pious status) within their home community. In Saharanpur, for men too, the adoption of such forms of dress is both symbolic of a more pious position and of an identity linked to the perceived status of Saudi as the centre of Islam and also a place perceived as holding great wealth and promise.

¹⁹⁷ Ankle length gown commonly worn in the Arabian Gulf.

turban wound round the *topi* (hat)¹⁹⁸, marking them out from the plainer Indian style of white *kurta* and turbanless *topi*. On the second visit, with Mustaqim, we again sat and chatted. Upon leaving, however, Mustaqim was more circumspect regarding the visitors, telling me ‘they are very good but you know also they are very rich’.

The Tabligh Jamaat, Reformism & Work

Becoming a member of the *Tabligh Jamaat* impacts on status and position within Saharanpur’s tight-knit gullies. For factory workers, being observant means time away from manual labour to attend prayers and snatch a few moments socialising with others. Although its members follow Islamic business and other daily practice, unlike many other reformist movements the Tabligh Jamaat does not seek to reform the bodies and hearts of individuals within the same space as daily pursuits. Instead, the movement seeks to separate individuals from corruptive influences of labour, work, business, community and family. This is embodied in the period of *khuruj*, during which time members are removed from interaction with these aspects of everyday life and even talk of such matters is discouraged¹⁹⁹. As Mohammad Arshad recalled of his forty day religious tour:

“The Amir told us that praise of Allah is the most important and that work is the second thing for the person. We cannot keep connection with our family or house when we are in *jamaat*. There is no worldly talking in the group, we have no permission to discuss family problems in the *jamaat*. He tells us about Islamic rules only. He tells us about The Quran and namaaz and about some moral books. There is no worldly talking about business or work. There is no gossip about tasty food. The Amir never told us to eat interesting or tasty food, he only told us about the life after death. He told us what will happen after our death. If our work is good then we will find heaven”.

This is not to say that the Tabligh Jamaat separates itself from economic activity beyond the period of *khuruj*. Indeed, in an echo of work outlined in the introduction of this

¹⁹⁸ Literally ‘hat’ but in this case referring to the Muslim skullcap.

¹⁹⁹ This draws on *hadiths* (religious verses) regarding The Prophet’s modesty in such matters. On one occasion he was visited by a follower, U’mar, who expressed his concern regarding The Prophet’s basic accommodation. The Prophet, cited here in a Tablighi publication, is noted to have replied: “O, U’mar! Are you still in doubt about this matter? Ease and comfort in the hereafter are much better than ease and comfort in this world. The unbelievers are enjoying their share of good things in this very world whereas we have all such things in store for us in the next” (cited in Idara Ishaat-E-Diniyat, 1944)

thesis regarding an 'entrepreneurial ethic' or particular ways of working associated with Islam, Janson (2014) describe how Tablighis in The Gambia sought to: "...escape professional careers that might 'corrupt' them, [and] were often led to establish their own businesses [...] they valued such business highly because the Prophet used to trade and trading is easily combined with the Tabligh" (p.87). For individuals such as Arshad, however, professional trades were never a possibility. Yet the desire to give time to *khuraj* and other *dawah* work intermingled with other concerns around the value of 'apna kam' or the need to 'make time for society'²⁰⁰.

Others, too, expressed a similar distinction between the worlds of family or work and the teachings of the movement. Women also participate in the *Jamaats*, albeit independently of men, and many working women were visited by them. Here too the emphasis was never on their labour, either in practical or moral terms:

"The *Tabligh* never bans our work but they say to us that we should do in our home as this is much respected. They say that we should do our *namaaz* first and that the work is second but they never ban on the work. They never see us as a low category as it is not a shameful work".

A homemaker in Kajoor Tala

"They never ban our work and preach only moral speech about *namaaz* and The Quran and not about the work. [...] They give some moral speech and tell us not to hurt or criticise anyone. I like the *Tablighi* education very much. They never ban our work but they improve our heart and mind".

A homemaker in Purana Mandi

Here there was a sense that the purity of the latter must not become sullied with the pollution and concerns of the former. For women, who often complained of the 'stigma' society tied to their participation in paid work²⁰¹, the fact that the *Jamaats* made little comment on their involvement was appreciated. Working women were able to feel a part of reformist processes rather than judged as lacking the piety to participate. Janson (2014) makes a similar point in her work on *Jamaats* in The Gambia, pointing out that, far from seeing the piety of *jamaati* activity as restrictive, women valued the opportunity to attend meetings, take respite from domestic duties and enjoy the company of others.

²⁰⁰ See following chapter.

²⁰¹ See chapter 4.

In a small gully across Kathakheri's main strip I met Ahmed, a young wood worker in his late teens whose unshaved beard still had the wispiess of youth. Like Arshad, Ahmed had become involved in the *Tabligh Jamaat* and told me of his time on *khuruj* and his adjusted daily practice:

"Sometimes it can be hard but it is my duty to Allah that I should make my namaaz and do the other things. I get up at 5am to do the religious work. At 9am I start this work but also pray five times per day. I work until 9pm at the maximum. I do not find it hard to balance. I go for *Jamaat* three days in every month, so 27 days for work and three for *Jamaat*. In this I got satisfaction in the heart. I do the lifestyle things, wear short trousers and do my namaaz but I do not know about the Islamic business".

For others, however, there were certain advantages to be gained from being identifiable as an observant Muslim, whether this be through the membership of the *Tabligh Jamaat* or more general reformist practice. Ahmed, a friendly man in his fifties, ran a small workshop employing around ten staff. Initially I spoke to one of his senior employees who was quick to praise his employer, even in his absence: "He is the only one who always pays on time. Many owners do not give money when they say they will, so the workers take revenge by running away when it is busy". Later I asked Ahmed a little more about the way he operates his business. Outwardly Ahmed, as with Arshad and Mustaqim, wore the symbols of being a good Muslim. Whereas many workers had little awareness of Islamic forms of business practice, even if they participated to a degree, for Ahmed it was foundational:

"I never take the worker's money and pay on time. Due to this the payments to me always come on time. This is god's gift. I always get money up front from the buyer, buyers are willing to do this as they know I will always keep my promise and deliver on time. Whether the work is small or big I never get a problem in payments thanks to god. Due to my belief I do not allow credit, people say that business cannot be done without credit but I am doing it. I do not take credit but I also do not make my workers work under credit. Due to my timely payment my workers trust me and so I do not get the problem many other owners have with workers running away".

The trust Ahmed created through his observance of Islamic practice meant that some of his workers remained with him for many years, an unusual situation in the gullies where labour was usually transient. For others, too, the observance and performance of religious observance could translate into trust-based relationships. Whilst Mustaqim had been on a couple of short *Jamaats* and, like Arshad, had discarded his jeans pant

(he told me they were still kept in a trunk but were now unused), he was not a full '*Jamaati aadmi*' and was fairly relaxed in his observance. However, some of the business relationships in which he engaged were very much framed in terms that reinforced trust and were, in part at least, bound up in a broader identity of respect found in being a 'good Muslim'. Whilst membership of the *Tabligh Jamaat* meant relatively rigorous conformity to religious practice the numbers in the wood industry who involved themselves directly remained relatively small. Beyond the confines of being identifiable as *jamaati*, however, there were a variety of others means through which one could cultivate an image of being pious, trusted or respectable.

Beyond the Tabligh: Other forms of Islamic Piety & Identity

As suggested at the start of this chapter, many (indeed the majority) of craft workers were not directly involved in the *Tabligh Jamaat*. This is not to say that they were not pious in their approach to Islam or observant of daily ritual and practice. Many individuals expressed ambivalence and disinterest. For others, however, the expression and observance of Islamic tradition, whilst not framed through involvement in the *Jamaats*, formed an important part of daily life. The term *sharif*, meaning honourable or of noble lineage, was one I heard a lot in the gullies. At times it was used as a reassurance to me that a particular person was okay to associate with. At others it was used as a way of affirming a bond of respect between two individuals. Mustaqim, for example, assured me on a couple of occasions that Arshad was a *sharif aadmi*. Likewise, Arshad would use the term in making suggestions as to those I should associate with. Rizwan Bhai was one such '*sharif admi*'. In his early sixties, friendly but serious in nature, Rizwan had first met Mustaqim during a business trip from Mumbai. In Mumbai Rizwan ran a successful wood manufacturing business which supplied furniture but also created sections of movie sets for Bollywood films. Shortly after meeting, Rizwan encouraged Mustaqim to join him in Mumbai. Although Mustaqim returned to Saharanpur they continued a business relationship. This bond was reinforced by their shared sense of religiosity and its associated moralities which meant trust could be more easily assured (Kuran, 2004). This identity, however, did not extend to another passion the two shared. In loyalties of cricket Mustaqim favoured Pakistan. Rizwan, meanwhile, supported India.

As with Rizwan Bhai, Mustaqim also did regular business with a neighbour. Unlike Rizwan, I initially found myself feeling wary of Abdul Fareed. Abdul was involved in running a local madrassa and would regularly lecture me on Islam. He was very much a man of the Deoband School and gave great virtue to the Madrassa system. His visits to Mustaqim's house were always accompanied by a change in atmosphere and a much more formal feeling. With myself or Rizwan Bhai there was always an informal air in the home. I would converse freely with his wife and daughter as would Rizwan Bhai. Whenever Abdul would call the curtains would immediately be drawn and purdah observed. Abdul gave an air of authority and would instantly command the space. Although he wore his beard and *kurta*, Mustaqim was fairly informal in his approach to *namaaz* or other aspects of daily practice. However, in Abdul's presence he was always careful to cultivate his observant image and was all too conscious of the economic and political influence Abdul exerted in the neighbourhood. The much more formal relationship between Mustaqim and Abdul also spurned a business relationship. Here, the arrangements followed lines that were very specifically regulated by Islamic business practice. The investment that Abdul eventually made allowed the family to re-establish a workshop and purchase sufficient wood following a period attempting to work in various other parts of the country²⁰². The arrangement was one of shared risk and potentially shared gain (Kuran, 2004). No interest was taken but instead the arrangement was one of shared profit once the initial investment had been returned.

For Mustaqim the careful cultivation of this relationship and the emphasis on his observance had resulted in an economic as well as a social end. The notion of being '*sharif*' was bound up not just with respectability but also with outward daily practice. Following unspoken rules of business in the gully and being known to be a 'good Muslim' allowed Mustaqim and others to be seen as people with whom business could be done. Reputation mattered to Mustaqim and he was always careful to cultivate it. The family lived in two small rented rooms of a very basic standard, cooked over the open fire and had little more than a couple of beds, some cooking equipment, an old TV and wood-working tools. In spite of this Mustaqim was generous with his hospitality and charitable

²⁰² I return to this in the following chapter.

giving. Visiting distant relatives who were experiencing greater hardship Mustaqim was quick to give them money. Even the family's only substantive item, an inverter²⁰³, was given by Mustaqim to the local Madrassa. Later he told me that this had been necessary as many poor children were studying there. This hospitality Mustaqim extended to me. Before my departure he was keen to ensure that the family had treated me as they would his son Javid. On my last night in the city I arranged to cook at their house. I served the guests first, taking my food later. Abdul Fareed was impressed and declared '*Insha Allah* (if it is god's wish) we will make a Muslim of him yet'!

Conclusion

Arshad's story emphasises the emotive importance members place on their involvement in the *Jamaat*. In many ways Arshad embodies what the *Tabligh Jamaat* seeks to be. He is representative of the notion that anybody can contribute to reforming Islamic practice. However, Arshad's story shows that care must be taken not to see participants as somehow separated from day-to-day life. Horstmann (2007), for example, describes how members were "frowned upon for leaving their mothers and children behind and for their escapist attitude" (p.110). Arshad often found himself having to negotiate with responsibilities to family, community and work. The ethnographic examples presented here illuminate the ways in which the movement is in continual interplay with other forms of status and authority emanating from craftsmanship, patronage, class and education. Multinational *Jamaats* bring ideas and discourses from further afield, reinforce a sense belonging that stretches beyond the confines of the craft working community and intercede with the embeddedness of the supply chain or national forms of identity. Although there is an emphasis on matters beyond the day to day, the *Tabligh Jamaat* interacts with the informal economic space, even if only in the fact that it takes workers out of it and, in principle at least, re-crafts them.

In the context of daily work in the gully, *jamaats* and other reformist activities interacted with labour arrangements and working practices. This included encouraging employers

²⁰³ Device connected to a car battery that switching between charging and powering according to the supply or non-supply of electricity.

to engage in certain approaches to labour relations or ensure that, those of a more observant perspective, followed certain rules regarding credit or acted to create particular circuits of production and exchange that are structured through an Islamic moral framework. However, this is observed to varying degrees and often circumvented. Early in fieldwork I asked often about credit among the wholesalers at the entrance of *Purana Mandi*. Most told me of their observance of Islamic principles. A Sikh wholesaler, however, was emphatic in his belief that the majority took concealed loans on interest. Whilst an outward, or genuine, piety was the currency of respectability for some, others looked to very different symbols. These included the flaunting of wealth to show one's successful business credentials through, for example, the hosting of lavish feasts or the strategic placement of a high end motorbike at the entrance of a home or workshop. Indeed, many of the bikes were themselves funded through interest bearing credit, yet were seen as an essential means to show one's success and attract more business. Whilst I have focused on a particular identity-based network, these examples act as a reminder that Islam is not the only 'sub-economy' (Kuran, 2004) but instead sits in a milieu of overlapping networks based on differing identities. This is an important point if we are to avoid 'reifying Islam' (Marsden & Retsikas, 2013). The lives of craft workers play out not only in the context of Islamic practice but in a complex milieu within which 'western style' consumption, Bollywood movies, and other relationships are a part. Of particular importance were networks based on friendship, the cultivation and maintenance of which occupied a great deal of the time of informants in the gullies. It is to this that the following chapter turns.



Men dressed in 'Saudi style' during Eid

Chapter Seven

From Friendship to Work (and back again): Social Relations & Production in Kamil Wali Gully



A group of young men hanging out whilst working and a collectively operated cutting shop

This chapter examines production in Kamil Wali Gully and focuses primarily on social relations that underpin economic activity. Whilst relations are varied and interact with religious and craft-based traditions and transformations, here I focus primarily on friendship. The chapter cuts across the interaction between working and social life in the gully. I focus on the depth of investment craft workers put into creating and sustaining social relations as well as more emotive aspects of these connections. In examining this I cover three primary areas. Firstly, I focus on spatial aspects where intense sociality created in tightly packed neighbourhoods, gullies and workshops feeds into the formation of relationships. Here I suggest that the nature of production regimes, the concentrated demand for labour and the highly social arenas of the workshop, bazaar and other spaces, all play a part in creating a variety of bonds and affiliations. Secondly, I emphasise the importance ascribed by workers in Saharanpur to notions of friendship and the mutuality and obligations therein. I suggest that strong and emotionally informed bonds must be given sufficient attention in understanding

what drives economic activity in both the local and beyond. In so doing, the chapter situates the gully, and the various individuals within it, as being located at the centre of complex emotive and material networks. Finally, I conceive these largely informal relations of production as being a part of the contemporary capitalist economy as opposed to being a peripheral effect endowed in pre-industrial affective relations. The chapter examines both material and emotive facets of these connections and begins to link this into the following section entitled 'Journeys Out' in which I relate social relations of the gullies to migration within India and beyond.

Before engaging with a descriptive account of the gully economy some contextualisation is required. In Saharanpur I was often struck by the depth of investment in social relationships and by the close and intimate bonds that formed between men who worked in tightly confined spaces while labouring in the city and beyond. Whilst confined within the context of the Muslim identity of the labour force, friendships and types of connections they drove, transcended kin and *biraderi*. The intense sociality of the gullies meant that production and work were constantly framed in terms of relationships between individuals and within groups. Tea shops, the masjid, gyms and the very public spaces of street and workshop created blurred and overlapping realms in which connections formed. These complex social relations interlocked with processes of finding work or workers, doing business and building affiliations. They were simultaneously enmeshed in mutual interests, exploitative associations, frictions and tensions. The importance of exploring more emotional aspects of economic life has only recently begun to be recognised in the South Asian context (Jeffery & Jeffery, 2012). Within work that has given attention to emotion (McHugh, 2002), affection (Desai, 2012) and intimacy (Jeffrey, 2010; Osella, 2012), links have been made between economic, religious, identity-based and emotive networks.

Among many of the men in Saharanpur's gullies it was friendship that formed the primary narrative of social grouping. Friendships ran deep. They could be intense and were loaded with expectation. The breakdown of such relationships could be dramatic. Jealousy or feelings of betrayal were often a feature, particularly amongst younger men and boys. Just as I had to navigate the complex relations in which I became embroiled,

others also negotiated the expectations and demands of friendship on a daily basis. Of course friendship forms a complex realm widely discussed within anthropological discourse (i.e. Dyson, 2010; Nisbett, 2007; Osella & Osella, 1998; Jeffrey, 2010). Friendships can be instrumental or intimate. Social relations bound up in friendship or other factors have their own politics that may differ from place to place. They are, in part at least, informed by religious and other moral discourses. Here I concur with Dyson (2010) in arguing that friendship is “primarily imagined as a relationship of trust and affection that simultaneously facilitated effective labor and was formed through that labor” (p.495). Whilst the full breadth of these discussions cannot be done justice here, some brief contextualisation is required.

Contextualising Friendship in Saharanpur

In a recent article Nisbett (2007) emphasises the significance of considering friendship groups as an equally important crucible of social reproduction in India as those of family and kin. Nisbett, in his work with call centre workers in Bangalore, argues that the “friendship group, however temporal, is a well-established sphere for the negotiation of identity and status” (p.948). In an industry dominated by a young male labour force and in an arena that was highly gendered it was these friendships that occupied much social energy of young men in the city. The importance ascribed to these relations at times surpassed those of family and kin. This could be seen not just in day-to-day social activity but also in patterns of affiliation and recruitment within workshops. A great deal of literature on labour in India focuses on caste and kinship networks as being the primary means of recruitment and control (i.e. Chakrabarty, 1989; Harriss-White, 2005)²⁰⁴. In Saharanpur, however, in spite of large numbers of respondents having relatives working in the industry (65%), relatively few laboured in the same location as their kin (21%)²⁰⁵. Likewise, patterns of recruitment did not take place through primarily kin-orientated networks but rather through friends and acquaintances.

²⁰⁴ This is not to say that these contributors see kinship as the only idiom of labour force organisation. However, it features strongly. Harriss-White (2005), for example, describes a rice processing factory in Bihar where Hindu workers were “Organised through kinship and locality” (p.2534) and where kinship alliances played a primary role in entry.

²⁰⁵ Data were gathered from 180 respondents in workshops and factories. There was little disparity between the two (22% and 20% respectively).

The importance of such affective networks could be seen as indicative of the pre-industrial nature of craft production. Carrier (1992), for example, argues that unlike industrial production, which “is seen to be impersonal and regulated by abstract forces such as ‘the market’, [...craft work] is seen to be personal and regulated by personal forces like ‘affection’, ‘creativity’ or bonds between people” (p.553). Likewise Geertz (1978) sees bazaar based economies as fundamentally entrenched in personal interconnections. Within these conceptions of economic activity impersonal forms of exchange are rooted in personal relationships which extend “beyond the transaction context [instead being] embedded in networks of social relations” (Stoller, 2008; p.196). As I have indicated previously, however, it is not my intention to situate the affective nature of the bazaar within this teleological narrative. Instead I argue that, if we are to situate such spaces as central to contemporary capitalism, then we should view embeddedness as existing across production regimes and forms of economic organisation (i.e. Granovetter 1985).

However, tackling this in terms of formal and informal work regimes alone proves insufficient. Friendship forms a complex realm which can be both supportive and exploitative (Dyson, 2010; Osella & Osella, 1998)²⁰⁶. Friendships among the gully workers of Saharanpur formed in highly gendered economic spaces, constructed across lines of informality and intimacy. As Osella (2012) describes of a male-dominated bazaar in Kerala²⁰⁷:

“The apparent informality of such intense male sociality is maintained through a specific male aesthetic of enjoyment, rooted in the particularities of the neighbourhood’s matrilineal system, a historical orientation towards bazaar economy, local politics of status distinction and a religious rhetoric of brotherhood and gender segregation”.

(p.535)

The nature and constitution of social relations within Islam also requires some further unpacking. Osella’s (2012) aforementioned point regarding brotherhood is of relevance

²⁰⁶ Dyson (2010) suggests that friendships can be conceived as containing opportunities to counter powerlessness and form a basis for mutual support but also acknowledges that they act in the reproduction of power. Likewise Osella & Osella (1998) argue that friendship can create a space within which existing hierarchies can be “*subverted, reversed, denied, re-affirmed in episodes of personal interaction*” (p. 189).

²⁰⁷ I return to this in more detail in chapter 5.

given a religious environment where egalitarian notions of friendship run strongly through Islamic discourse (Gardner & Osella, 2003). Goitein (1971), for example, suggests that the pre-Islamic Arab world was dominated by connections of kinship until the arrival of Islam when friendship took on new meaning:

“Formal friendship, *suhba*, came into the Arab world with religion, with the Islam of Muhammad. Conversion was conceived as a personal bond between the new believer and the founder of the religion. [...] From that time on, spiritual bonds of the greatest variety became the base of sustained personal relationships transcending family attachments, the strongest being those connected with Islamic mysticism known as Sufism”.

(p. 485-486)

Whilst this lacks nuance, it provides a perspective through which to think about friendship in terms of an Islamic economy (Amin & Thrift, 2008). Building from research in Pakistan, Marsden (2005) points out that friendship, like many other areas of life such as business, education and family, is conceived as bound up in meanings surrounding the notion of a ‘Muslim life’. These religious aspects of the working environment and its social relations cannot be ignored but there is also a need to pay attention to non-religious, emotive aspects of friendship, which are a critical part of labour relations in the city. Here, I argue, that tightly bound relationships between friends and friendship groups represent an “economy of affection”²⁰⁸ (De Boeck & Plissart, 2004)²⁰⁹ that is not always and at all times framed within concepts of Muslim identity (Marsden & Retsikas, 2013). Indeed, Nisbett’s (2007) study focuses on Hindu call centre workers, where cross-caste friendships were constituted in highly emotive and powerful ways. Desai (2012) describes, what he terms, ‘ritual friendship’ where male bonds are affirmed through *prasad* (temple ritual)²¹⁰ in which the notion of *prem* (love/affection)²¹¹ is central:

“the way in which ritual friendship is opposed to ideologies both of caste and of brotherhood, and why the idea of love or affection (*prem*) occupies such a central place in its imagination [...] The importance of such an approach is that it recognises that an ideology which ignores caste, as ritual friendship does, can exist alongside a contrary ideology that affirms caste. Ritual friendship, the sentiment it involves, and the ties of affection it builds

²⁰⁸ Although not in the ‘uncaptured’ sense that is utilised by Hyden (1980).

²⁰⁹ This, along with friendship, is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

²¹⁰ A ritual of gift-giving to an idol at a shrine or temple.

²¹¹ In Saharanpur the more commonly used word is *pyar*.

beyond individuals, express the recognition of a fundamental affinity of people and the assertion of people as the same, an idea that caste denies”.

(p.115)

Likewise Jeffrey's (2010) accounts of 'timepass' engaged in by unemployed former students in Meerut, relates a scene where friendships formed on street corners and in tea stalls reached across old divides of caste and, in his case, religion. For Jeffery these actions formed an 'intimate culture'²¹² that fostered the building of trust and solidarity. Whilst there was no ritualization in Saharanpur, expressions of *par* (love) formed a central part of the ways friendship was articulated. As with Jeffery (2010) nonchalant banter and expressions of affection were central to building deep affiliations. However, they were as much embroiled within an economic maelstrom of work and production as they were expressions of unity and compatriotism. Here, I take these debates further by exploring the ways in which strong friendship bonds interact with an economy of production both within the local craft industry, migration out from Saharanpur, and within its position as a supplier of complex global networks of production.

The gendered nature of labour spaces, sociality and the face-to-face informality of relations in the bazaar played important roles in shaping labour networks, as did notions of shared religious identity or reformist discourses. Unpacking these relations in the context of informal economic activity is critical, as, in an environment dominated by intermediaries and middlemen, "people rely on their personal, familial and communal repertoire of networks to find employment [and] ensure job security" (Singerman, 1995; p.139)²¹³. Whether we see such relations in affective or material terms (or both), the importance of giving attention to these networks and individuals who comprise them was revealed in particularly strong terms by Arshad when he reflected on his reasons for leaving factory work:

"Then my mother told me that it is not good work as there is no respect so I should leave there. She said that it is not good as there is no time for rest, food, family or society. When I was in the factory I could not meet my friends so they grew angry with me. I was cut from society due to this work".

Mohammad Arshad, 2011

²¹² Here Jeffery develops the notion from Herzfeld (2005).

²¹³ Singerman bases her work in poor neighbourhoods of Cairo but the parallels are clear.

Everyday Life of the Gully: Spaces of Sociality

Kamil Wali gully comprised only wood shops. However, nearby there were a variety of services and suppliers for the labour force: *Chai* stalls, small eateries and general provision stores, a butcher's shop or two outside which dogs were always in anxious wait, the odd mechanic, a small doctor's office where concoctions were as likely to give you an 'interesting time' as they were to cure your ailment, the *masjids* and gyms adorned by hyper-macho images of ripped body builders or movie stars. All of these spaces created realms of sociality that constantly overlapped with work and business. Just as in chapter five, where I discussed the socialisation of *shagrids* into both 'pure' and 'impure' practices, so the occupants of the workshops tended to coalesce into groups who shared similar interests and spaces of sociality. Those who attended the gym together would often form working partnerships. Likewise those who regularly attended the masjid, fell into labouring parties. Relations, however, were by no means exclusive and regularly overlapped.

The spatial arrangements of Kamil Wali Gully were highly social in nature. Each workshop had its own small labour force or just a lone craft worker. However, the workshops were open-fronted and workers often dropped in to chat and take *chai*. At times the exchanges were purely social in nature and at others overlapped with business. These spatial configurations played an important part in the shaping of social relations, as did other spaces of sociality. Often I went out with Mustaqim's eldest son Javid to join him and his friends. Once away from the household, Javid could be boisterous and highly entertaining. The tightly packed residential lanes that wound off the production areas of Khatakheri provided highly social spaces through which it was not possible to pass without being waylaid by friends or relatives. Mustaqim was always encouraging of this time for Javid, telling me that it was important for Javid to build his own networks in the neighbourhood. Indeed, Mustaqim placed similar importance on *ghūmnāi* (roaming) and encouraged myself and Javid to make a trip away to the hill station of Mussoorie.

Javid's network of friends were already expansive. Although Javid still worked with his father, the networks that formed almost organically in the tightly packed gullies were

the scene of intense connection-building activity. Time spent with the teenage boys consisted mostly of 'time-pass' (Jeffrey, 2010) or *ghūmnāi*. Hanging out in a friend's mobile phone shop or sitting together on a scrap of wasteland at the end of the bazaar did not hold anything particularly specific to that undertaken by teenage boys anywhere in the world. Although relatively fluid, the groups of young boys and men with whom Javid spent his spare time engaged in a great deal of mutual exchange. This involved both the sharing of material items, phones, clothing or bicycles as well as the exchange of favours. Standing by a friend when they were in trouble or even taking great risks to get a message to a girl on their behalf formed an important part of reinforcing bonds. As one of Javid's friends explained:

"Today I went with Abdul to his girlfriend's house. She told him that she was making *aloo paratha*²¹⁴ and that he could come. Then I suddenly went there to take the *paratha*. She gave me in the plate. She was waiting at the gate and said 'Salaam', as Abdul is like my brother it was okay for me to speak to his girlfriend. We both exchange help like this in the love affairs. He cannot go there directly as her parents will beat him a lot if they see him. It is risky for me also but at least if they make some ban on me Abdul will still be okay. It always happens in love affairs that parents beat the boyfriend. In Abdul's relationship everyone has agreed for the marriage but the girlfriend's father is very rude and does not agree for their relationship. But Abdul is also a very rude person and has told to everybody that he will marry only that girl. The girl is also very strict in this and has said that she will marry only with Abdul but her parents do not know".

The closeness of these bonds and their constant reinforcement through favours and exchanges contributed to building tight friendships. This is not exclusive to Saharanpur. As Nisbett (2007) points out, for call centre workers in Bangalore, this "kind of group egalitarian spirit is often understood as an important constitutional element in the practice of male friendship" (p.941). However, in a neighbourhood where the economy was deeply embedded or 'nested' in the everyday (Kudva, 2009/2005), these relations soon translated into connections of labour, recruitment, business and production. As Barkat, a 32 year-old buffing *thēkēdār* explains:

"...they [the people I employ] all live here [in my neighbourhood]. I have known them since childhood as our height and age is the same. We played together in childhood so I know them very well. They are my friends also;

²¹⁴ Fried bread stuffed with potato.

we meet together often for going out and for tea or for the cinema. If some worker cannot do our work then he can honestly and frankly tell me and I never mind it”.

Here, however, we have to be careful. De Neve (2014), describing the role of friendship in maintaining workforces in small production houses of Tamil Nadu’s textile industry, focuses on the way in which *thēkēdārs* utilise ‘narratives of friendship’ to maintain loyalty among workers. This, De Neve argues, is not always successful, the apparent strength of such bonds emphasised by *thēkēdārs* was not necessarily reciprocated by workers. Labour would still jump ship or abandon the *thēkēdār* even taking an advance with them. This is not uncommon in Saharanpur either. Directly opposite to our brass overlay shop was the workshop of Shanawas. Like Aslam²¹⁵ before his return to labour work, Shanawas owned a small workshop employing a few craftsmen. Shanawas had built his business on family income from petty landownership and agricultural production in a nearby village. This provided him with the capital to purchase wood supplies and pay advances to recruit labour. Although he had not trained as a craftsman he was often to be seen working alongside his staff, mostly undertaking basic carpentry. Amongst his employees was my friend Mohammad Sajid. As with most of the employed wood carvers in the gully, Sajid worked on piece rate²¹⁶. This he preferred, describing it as “*apna kam*” (own work) as opposed to salaried arrangements of *mazdoori kam* (labour work). We often sat and joked together and I made regular trips to his home in the nearby village of *Datholi*. The family, of the *Teli/Malik* caste, had a small plot of land in the village where his two brothers run a barber’s shop. Sajid had worked with Shanawas for around six months, having previously worked in other gullies and elsewhere in the country²¹⁷. As with many workshop owners Shanawas assiduously cultivated a friendly relationship with Sajid and the other workers. Shanawas was particularly reliant on Sajid due to his carving skill and high work rate. Whilst Sajid saw their relationship in reciprocal terms he was also conscious of his own aspirations:

²¹⁵ Arshad’s friend mentioned in chapter 3.

²¹⁶ 74% of workers surveyed in the informal sector were paid in this way with 62% preferring it to other arrangements such as fixed salary.

²¹⁷ I return to Sajid’s story of labour migration in chapter 5.

“I can reach a higher position than this but it takes a long time. It may or may not be possible. Actually money is necessary for every business. I can do it in the future but now I am not ready for it. Now I have no money for business, it takes 1 lakh rupees to start. I can start my wood business and I can make my own bed. I can reach up to Shanawaz’s level. I want to make my own business in the woodcarving industry. Otherwise my plan is to set up a business in which there is no need of great money but the earning should be more”.

About halfway through my time in Saharanpur Sajid left for Hyderabad. Shortly before his departure I went to his house in the village. He explained that he would be departing to work with friends there. However, he asked me not to tell Shanawas. It was only later that I discovered the reason for his request. Shortly after Sajid’s departure I did the *Jumairat* (Thursday) rounds to make and collect (or attempt to collect) payments with Shanawas. Afterwards I took him and his brother back to their village on my bike. During the journey Shanawas complained that Sajid had ‘done a fraud’. It became apparent that Sajid had left without working off his advance. Around three months later, however, Sajid returned to Shanawas’s shop and continued to work with only a brief complaint being made. It is worthy of reflection, then, that apparently deep-seated friendships may be as much constructed in the context of material need as they are in ways that are more emotive.

There are, however, some distinctions here that require attention. Sajid and Shanawas lived some distance from each other in separate villages and hence there was little entanglement between their families. The depth of relations described by Barkat, however, represented a somewhat deeper set of obligations. For Barkat’s workers a betrayal would mean not only a falling out between two individuals but between two neighbouring families. This is important not just in terms of understanding mutuality but also obligation. For Javid and his friends, for example, each other’s mothers were held in the same respect as their own. A betrayal of a friend, then, could mean the wrath of the friend’s mother and other relatives. Fear of such effects created a further layer of trust and obligation. However, the relations that formed between men, whether it be in childhood, during apprenticeship, in the workshops, or whilst working elsewhere in the country, had a clear impact on the structuring of the labour force. Whilst some

groups of workers came together with little in the way of previous relations, many labouring in the gullies had spent long periods working side by side, building trust and camaraderie.

Sajid, along with many other young men in the gully, was regularly in attendance at a nearby gym. These spaces, along with teashops and eateries, formed a focal point for social and physical activity. The number of gyms in Indian cities and towns has exploded in recent years, with this mirrored by increased use of steroids readily available from pharmacists (Iyer, 2011). A local doctor joked “the first week they come for their strength shot and the second for their power shot”, the first being the steroid and the second being a treatment for resulting impotence. Sajid, however, did not take such supplements, although he attended two gyms regularly. One was mostly frequented by Muslims and the other, on the edge of the wood mohallas, by a more mixed clientele. Just as Arshad and others would take time away from work for payers, so Sajid and friends would depart to work out for short periods. Whilst much of the talk was banter based, the gyms also served as a space in which information about work could be exchanged, complaints about employers aired and plans for migration discussed. They represented a semi-private space that acted to cement links between individuals. In this sense they were not only a social space but could also be seen as a location where common bonds were forged and networks strengthened in an atmosphere that had little to do with common identities built around piety and religious observance.

Arshad & Mehboob

For Arshad, too, in spite of his membership of the Tabligh Jamaat, non-Jamaati networks, based on bonds forged in workplace and neighbourhood, remained his main source of employment, support and mutuality. Arshad’s story was one of change experienced in both the personal and economic realms. When he became a *shagrid*²¹⁸, learning brass overlay, the work was high status and generated a good income. At this time brass was cut by hand from sheets. Using a fine-pointed chisel and light hammer,

²¹⁸ Apprentice

craftsmen would tap out patterns over a wooden block. It was in this environment that Arshad began business with his friend Mehboob. Within a couple of years things changed. One successful brass worker purchased large cutting machines and began to manufacture pre-cut shapes. Arshad's work now involved merely tacking ready-cut brass to wooden components. Overnight the work deskilled as a new niche was added to the supply chain (Tsing, 2009):

"There were few people doing this work but then one man started to manufacture ready cut pieces. After this many people came in this work as they thought it was beneficial. Readymade brass meant that they didn't have to spend time learning. Due to this my work became less so I stopped my business. I went to a factory. My friend Mehboob thought about leaving also and told me that I should keep the shop. I rejected his proposal and left as our business in Kathakheri could no longer fulfil expenditure for two families.

A friend in a factory told me to come for work. He told me that I'd get 150rs a day. There was checking for every worker. The gatekeeper wrote the time we came in and there were foremen who watched us. The foremen were very rude. We couldn't rest even for one minute as the rules were strict. It was difficult for me because I had been doing my own work but there I was labour.

In my shop I could rest for 2-3 hours each day but there I got only one hour for lunch. When I worked in the factory I went at 8am from my house by bus and started work at 9am. In the evening I left the factory and again came back. It was hard for me as I didn't reach home until 7pm. I had to wait in line to collect money like a servant. We often got money very late and after rude behaviour of the owner and foreman".

In spite of reduced income and status, Arshad opted to return to his trade, preferring this to working in factories 'like a servant' and citing the need to 'make time for society' as being critical. The partnership between himself and Mehboob continued on and off. Friends from the time of their apprenticeship, the two were close and often made decisions regarding work together. By the time I arrived in Saharanpur Mehboob had managed to build a petty manufacturing business making boxes for export. A year after fieldwork, when I returned to the city, Arshad admitted his business was struggling. A couple of months after my second departure he informed me during a telephone conversation that he had had to shut up shop. Once again, however, it was his friendship

with Mehboob that came to the rescue. Within days of closing his small shop Mehboob offered Arshad a share in his business. The extent of support provided by Mehboob far outweighed what Arshad could reciprocate, in the short term at least. Such actions can be interpreted in a variety of ways. It can be seen as Arshad's investment in the resources networks of friendship, or in *wasta*, paying off. It can also be seen in terms of reciprocal relations in which Mehboob is considering a longer term future which will eventually yield returns. However, there is also an emotive content here that stretches beyond mere rational considerations and instead brings focus on a genuine affection between the two men. Within the gullies more generally, however, there existed other forms of collective working which embodied various arrangements.

Collective Working: Forming Crews

Whilst certain affiliations may be drawn along lines of respectability, '*sharif*' or forms of religiosity, many are also born out of the types of tight social relationships formed in neighbourhoods and gullies whilst growing up. As with Barkat, many of Javid's friends would likely eventually become partners, colleagues, employees or employers. Relations of production, then, took different forms. Particularly striking, however, were the various types of collective working that took place. Groups of men regularly formed themselves into teams or crews who operated together to increase their work capacity, improve their position of negotiation or to be able to undertake a greater number of production stages. The teams in Kamil Wali Gully formed around a variety of identities, many of which have been discussed in the preceding sections. In a small workshop across the main road from our brass shop a group of eight men had managed to lever their cutting machines into the tight space. All were from an outlying village and all were of the Teli *biraderi*. The team had formed itself around kinship-based affiliations and village networks. Elsewhere, however, teams formed around other commonalities which, as discussed in the previous chapters, included religious observance or a fondness for other pursuits.

A little way down Kamil Wali Gully from Arshad's shop was a metal doorway leading into an open courtyard where several *aree* (saw) machines²¹⁹ were situated. The space was rented collectively between the machine operators but the machines themselves were self-owned. The work was on piece rate and the cutters could demand a reasonable amount compared to some other sections of the production process. The machines were reliant on Saharanpur's decidedly dodgy power supply, meaning that the operators were often idle and tended to work late to make up for lost time. It was during these power outs that I headed down to their workshop to sit and chat, drink tea and smoke *beedies*²²⁰. Our conversations had to be dropped suddenly whenever the power returned. Orders usually arrived from the carving shops which may have received work directly from a customer or as an outsourced order from one of the showrooms. The carving shops used a pre-cut stencil²²¹ to draw out the design on the wood. Into this the shapes were cut before it was returned to the sender who in turn added carving on top. Although each man owned his own machine the group worked both independently and collectively. This flexibility meant that they could handle both, large and small orders. The operators utilised a collective approach to working in order to strengthen their position within the gully economy. Others, too, engaged in similar practices.

Nafees, Wasim, Imran and his brother Monis, the highly skilled group of carvers whose young shagrid had been the subject of a clout round the ear²²², also worked together in an informal team sharing profits between them. The team was flexible and members came and went with some heading for periods of work outside the city but they were always welcomed back upon their return. The relations between the men, aside from the two brothers, were primarily based around acquaintance and friendship. They knew each other from youth or had worked together previously. Nafees, Wasim and Imran had all spent time in the Gulf. Wasim had been the first to go and had recruited the other two. Although they had already known each other, their bonds of friendship were further strengthened in the dormitory environment of the furniture making factory

²¹⁹ Cutting machines with fine blades for making shaped holes in wood.

²²⁰ Cheap cigarettes consisting of tobacco rolled in a tobacco leaf and tied with a length of thread.

²²¹ This is made by and purchased from a designer. The designers are particularly skilled and often highly regarded in the market. They are also few in number.

²²² See chapter 5.

where they worked²²³. As with the *aree* machine operators the collectivity of their operation allowed them to produce in larger quantities and handle more substantial orders. It also meant that they were able to better manage risk. As Nafees pointed out:

“...if one of us has some problem for money or does not have enough to purchase wood, then we help with this. Then if some time I have this problem I know they will help me also. We have known each other for many years and are all respectful in this”.

Arshad lived around two kilometres from his workshop. One afternoon, when there were no orders to complete, we went to talk to a group of young men working near his house. When I met Nizamuddin Ansari and his three friends they were sitting in a small open-fronted workshop attached to Nizamuddin’s brother’s house. All were carvers and were employed adding designs to chair legs that had been outsourced from a nearby workshop. They were younger and less experienced than the team in Kamil Wali Gully. They were not related and all four were of different *biraderis*. As we chatted, two of them departed, along with Arshad, for their *namaaz* but the others remained to work and talk with me. Nizamuddin and his friends explained their arrangement, one which took them into various spaces, but always as a group:

“This place [their current workshop] is our reserve place we can come anytime. We have double the benefit as we can work in the factory or in this place. Twenty days ago we were doing work in a big factory. Before going there [as with now] we were taking work from anywhere, it came from different places. Nowadays the work is very low in that factory but after some time we plan to go back there. We are doing work on a contract basis so it is not fixed but [as we can move] it means work is regular. When the work is low in the factory then we can move in this place and when the work again increases in the factory then we can go back there. We can go anywhere to get the work.

We are four people and we always go together in the factories but we do not take any other person. [Last time also] we all went together in the factory. We are always four people but sometimes we have arranged one carpenter for us as we took a contract in that factory so we had need of a carpenter and polish wallah also. We made a group as we wanted to be able to do the full work in one place²²⁴. We already knew that there was lots of

²²³ These circulations between home and migrant destinations and the bonds that are built in the process are returned to in following chapters.

²²⁴ Here the team collectively take on the role of *thēkēdārs*, by bringing in additional labour who they pay.

work there. We directly went there and asked for work. The rate is very good in that factory so we took the decision to do work there.

We decided together to go there for work. We always do work together because we are best friends. We can chat and make jokes. We will not go in a factory if the owner says he needs only one worker, we always go together. There is no boss we are all equal. We cannot start our work alone. We are not friends from childhood but we first met in a factory and worked in the same place. Our friendship started there. We have been friends for 6 years.

A while ago we went together for work in Haryana, in a place called Ketthal. There all of us friends went together. We were all four in a group there. We were working on carving on a Mandir. We were only four who were working there and the owner gave us the work. We found good money from there, it was very good. The payment came from the Mandir organisation. The priest gave it to us²²⁵.

For Nizamuddin Ansari and his friends the decision to create a team gave them a sense of companionship and belonging. As with others I met, the emphasis was on the idea that work time passes with greater ease when you are part of a group. In an environment where long hours were the norm, overlapping work and social time made sense. However, there were also more practical elements to their relationship. Not only could they handle larger quantities of work when labouring away from the factory but they could also increase their bargaining power when negotiating with owners on rates and conditions.

Matters of the Heart: Friendship beyond the Workplace

Although Arshad did not work with Mehboob during the fieldwork period, the relationship with him, his *ustad* Islam and others were important in others area of his life aside from work. Arshad had, and still has, a heart condition, something that he had suffered from for around eight years of age. A small hole in one of his heart valves meant that he often suffered from angina and found it hard to engage in more physical tasks. The condition was manageable, although he had to purchase medication on a regular

²²⁵ Adapted and edited from interview transcript.

basis. During my time with him, however, a local doctor advised that he should go to Delhi for tests. Mehboob, Arshad and I made several trips through the night in order to get in line at the large government operated GB Pant Hospital. Each time the journey was wearing. We would take a late night train, arriving after only a couple of hours' sleep. The morning would then be taken up with repeated queuing, during which time we were able to sleep a little further on the hospital floor. After a series of trips and several rounds of tests the doctors concluded that an operation would be appropriate.

For Arshad this immediately required utilising friendship networks in order to acquire the necessary resources. In part, this was financial as, although government hospitals provide free treatment in terms of doctors and surgeons, the patients themselves must provide the medicines and equipment required. Although Arshad was concerned about these costs and the loss of earnings, he knew that he would be able to raise the necessary funds from friends and relatives, albeit on a loan basis. In addition, he would have to bring four people to provide blood donations for the operation. For Arshad and his family, however, there was real concern about the risks involved. Arshad was unsure whether he should continue with medication instead of undergoing surgery. The decision was eventually made collectively during a meeting at his house. Present for this were those close friends predating his involvement in the *Tabligh Jamaat*, including Mehboob and his former *ustad*, Islam, as well as family members. In spite of his involvement in the global Jamaat movement, and the importance he ascribed to it, the relations built within the *mohalla*, during his apprenticeship and in the workshops were the ones that he now called upon. Eventually, after a long discussion, it was decided that the operation was too risky and that he should continue with medication instead.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored a variety of social relations present in Kamil Wali Gully. It has unpacked the various arrangements and forms of identity around which teams of workers coalesced. Identities regularly overlapped but could involve biraderi, religious observance, body building, drinking or just be a result of living and growing up in the same neighbourhood. Importantly the formation of such teams was not just about

being with friends or having company (although this should not be discounted) but also about improving collective position in the market place and strengthening bargaining power. Indeed, the mixed nature of such teams and of the wider economic environment suggests that in spite of the difficulties (Lindell, 2010; Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2009) forms of class and collective identity formation do take place. The creation of teams also holds a degree of reflection of the organisational structure of Jamaats, which in themselves have roots in *Sufi* forms of ordering. Within this milieu I have also tried to grasp at something much less tangible: To try to bring out emotive as well as material aspects of the relations present. This is not an easy area to explore. Here description cannot convey feeling. For me the experience of fieldwork was highly emotive. Being a part of the networks and connections present in the informal labouring spaces of the city involved more than mere tacit engagement: It required an involvement of the heart.

Whilst there is always a danger in transposing the emotional experience of a fieldworker onto others for whom the locality is an everyday experience, there is something broader to be gained here. For groups of workers, such as the four friends I met through Arshad, economic activity is tied in with an emotional experience that contains its own layers of obligation, exploitation and mutual support. The connections this generates in the 'local' are not only critical to understanding labour arrangements in Saharanpur. They also feed into connections and networks built out from the gullies as craft workers engage in migration to other areas of India and beyond. Whilst I do not paint a relationship between emotion, friendship and work being rooted in a pre-industrial 'economy of affection' (i.e. Hydén, 1980), instead relying on affective relations throughout economic spaces and across supply chains, there are certain ways this plays out in the context of Saharanpur. The deep investment in building strong social bonds, as described in this chapter, may be affected by religious notions of brotherhood, the spatial environment of *mohallas* and be underscored by the cultural median of *wasta* (Elyachar, 2010; El-Said & Harrigan, 2009). However, in the context of a highly precarious labour force it also forms a critical means through which economic survival is obtained and, simultaneously, the labour force is reproduced. None the less emotive aspects, the desire to be with friends, intimacy, comradeship and belonging all played an important part in decisions regarding work locations and working arrangements.

Indeed, similar considerations, along with other emotive facets such as a sense of adventure, a desire for independence and aspirations towards greater status, were also important to processes driving migration from Saharanpur. It is to these, as well as practical and historical factors impacting migration that the following section, entitled 'Journeys Out', now turns.



Hanging out at the Gym

PART THREE

‘JOURNEYS OUT’

Interval Two

Contextualising Migration



A train departs from Saharanpur Station

When I arrived in Saharanpur I had no intention of looking at migration. Indeed, the majority of research on India's Muslim craft workers paints an image of people somehow confined to localities by bonds of culture and history (see: Kumar, 1988; Metha, 1997; Mohsini, 2010; Wilkinson-Weber, 1999). It was not long, however, before it became clear that the lives of the craftsmen and the spaces that they inhabited, were much more fluid than this image suggests. Wholesalers and factory owners were quick to complain about the loss of labour to outward migrations and many of those who I came to call friends were regular migrants. As well as numerous forms of internal migration there was also a substantive emergence of migration to the Gulf. This 'interval' section sets up the following two chapters that deal with these two areas. I introduce both chapters together as there is a need to emphasise the interlocking and overlapping nature of internal and external migration.

As with previous chapters, this section revolves around the stories of individuals. Some have been introduced previously: Mustaqim Ansari, whose efforts to set up business elsewhere met with varying levels of success and an eventual return to Saharanpur and Mohammad Sajid, who worked mostly as a piece rate labourer with groups of friends.

There are others, too, who become part of this story of migration, such as Musharraf, the serial migrant, and Wasim, who was away from home for the first time at the age of thirteen. Various returnees from other Indian cities and the Gulf add their experiences too. Some were young, some old. Some had worked as labour, others as *thēkēdārs* or foremen. All were men and while some occasionally travelled with wives and children the vast majority found themselves working and living in various all-male environments. Finally there were those for whom the labour camps and construction sites of the Gulf had become the destination space. They include H.M Aqueel, who had returned home for good after spending most of his working life away and Gulfam who was away in the labour camps for the first time having seen the loss of his furniture making business in Saharanpur.

Migration as a category of ethnographic exploration is by no means new and has become increasingly discussed in anthropology over recent decades with the deployment of multi-sited (i.e. Marcus, 1995; Falzon, 2009) and migration ethnographies (i.e. Englund, 2008; Olwig, 2007). Here anthropologists attempt to deal with the flexibility and mobility of labour and capital in the era of neo-liberalism (Ferguson, 2002, Ong, 2006)). Whilst there has been a body of fascinating contributions emanating from this work there are several areas left relatively un-explored. For example, in introducing a recent special issue of *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Gardner & Osella (2003) suggest that there has been very little focus on internal labour migration in South Asia in spite of “irrefutable evidence that movement, both within rural areas and between villages, towns and cities, has been, and continues to be, a central feature of life within the subcontinent” (p.vi)²²⁶. Dewind and Holdaway (2008) point out that there has been a tendency for “migration research and policy [to focus] on internal and international migration separately”, proposing instead that the two should be treated as interlinked.

Whilst I do not orientate the discussion towards policy, in the following chapters I contribute to calls to better understand the linkages between internal and external

²²⁶ For some exceptions see Kamble (1983), Oberai & Singh (1983), Sethi (2007) (although these contributions tend toward quantitative rather than anthropological investigation).

migration. In addition, there are other factors that make Saharanpur particularly interesting in this context. A reading of the literature on Muslims in India gives a clear sense of division between the mobility, both physical and social, of Muslims in the north and south of the country. There exists a growing body of work on the migration of South Indian Muslims to the Gulf (i.e. Sharif, 1998; Osella & Osella 2003, 2011; Prakash, 1998). Yet Uttar Pradesh registered some 125,000 emigrants to the Gulf in 2009, having more than quadrupled from five years earlier²²⁷ (Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, 2010) and pushing it above Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu²²⁸, which had previously dominated in terms of absolute numbers²²⁹. The demand for cheap labour in the gulf has certainly contributed to ever-increasing numbers of workers departing for the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and other Gulf countries. Whilst there is no data available for UP on religious affiliation of emigrants, data from Kerala suggests that numbers are largest among Muslims (Zachariah & Rajan, 2004), a pattern also observed in data on Indian Gulf migrants as a whole where around 45% are Muslim, making them the largest group (Czaika & Varela, 2012)²³⁰ of migrants from India.

When dealing with internal migration, however, there are no emigration clearances required, meaning that there is little data available. Drawing on census numbers²³¹ Deshingkar (2006) puts estimates at 45 million internal labour migrants in India, although Deshingkar believes this to be an underestimate²³². States such as U.P. and Bihar are known as the providers of much of the country's internal migrant labour²³³ and have large Muslim populations (particularly in U.P.²³⁴). Muslims, then, are very much involved in internal migration. On Muslim internal migration, data is all but non-existent. However, while discussing the Gujarat riots, Jasani (2008) suggests that many

²²⁷ Exact figures are 125,783 for 2009 and 27,428 for 2004. Figures based on number of workers granted emigration clearance/ ECNR Endorsement.

²²⁸ Kerala, 119,384; Andhra Pradesh, 69,233; Tamil Nadu, 78,841 (2009 figures).

²²⁹ As a percentage of population UP remains lower than these states.

²³⁰ Hindus constitute about 34% and Christians 19%.

²³¹ She uses the 2001 census.

²³² In a later report for the UNDP Deshingkar & Akter (2009) place the figure at 42.3 million.

²³³ Deshingkar and Akter suggest the states are the source of the highest levels of outward migration at 2.6 and 1.7 million respectively.

²³⁴ 32,640,158 (18.5% of total) by the 2001 census, although this will likely increase considerably when 2011 census data become available.

of the victims in Ahmedabad had originally been economic migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

In spite of this, and unlike in South India, there is little sense of spatial mobility amongst Muslims in the north; as with the literature on artisans, there is often a narrative of confinement, of living within walls or, indeed, of being ghettoised (Seabrook & Siddique, 2011; Gayer & Jaffrelot 2013). When migration by North Indian Muslims is discussed it is often talked about in these terms. The movements are painted as inward looking, as following roads that lead to bounded spaces, trajectories of marginalisation and separation (Saberwal, 2010; Jasani, 2008; Jaffrelot & Thomas, 2012) albeit to varying degrees (Heitmeyer, 2009; Williams, 2012). The reasoning for this narrative is twofold: on the one hand the 'community' itself is presented as a 'pulling' influence and on the other the external pressures of minority status, ostracism and even violence impose an external force 'pushing' inwards. As Saberwal (2010) puts it:

"The experience (the push) of collective violence, along with (the pull of) Deoband, Barelwi, and related influences, persuaded growing fractions of Muslims to withdraw into communally marked spaces. Such relocations carry a variety of costs: the physical and economic costs of having to find another home, and the social and emotional costs of having to reconfigure one's matrix of relationships. Alongside the ideological pulls from both sides, it was the shared experiences, or threats, of violence that have persuaded people to pay the costs of this reconfiguring".

(p.16-17)

The story is similar across a body of work, such as that on the aforementioned riots in Ahmedabad and elsewhere in Gujarat (Jasani, 2008; Jaffrelot & Thomas, 2012). Whilst Saharanpur has seen communal tension leading to a spatial reorganisation along religious lines and to experiences that have resonances with that described above, there has not been the extreme violence seen in some cities. Instead, the craftsmen and workers of the wood *mohallas* proved to be much more outward looking and cosmopolitan than some of this work would suggest. Their experiences as labour migrants reveal a narrative that allows for comparison with broader discussion on labour migration in South Asia and elsewhere.

Ethnography reveals a complex picture where structural aspects constantly interplay with 'agency' in the lives of those involved (Rogaly et al 2003, De Neve, 2003, Wright, 1995²³⁵). Labour migrants may see the experience as providing opportunity to free themselves from social constraints or for adventure (Shah, 2006). This loosening of social constraints can, in turn, lead to migrants and destination spaces being morally evaluated by those staying behind. Contrasting images mean destinations are seen as both morally questionable and yet advanced, 'modern' and developed (Ferguson, 1997). Whilst migrants may find themselves morally evaluated, migration can facilitate upward social mobility (Osella & Osella, 2000), increase cosmopolitan credentials (Gidwani & Sivaramkrishnan, 2003) or even religious and moral authority, aspects that potentially bring conflict with established local hierarchies (Simpson, 2003). Indeed, some work regarding South Asian Muslims suggests that migrants themselves are intimately involved in a reformulation of religious identity within an increasingly internationalised and 'purist' framework (Gardner, 1995; Kurien, 2002). Whilst this is often presented as a contemporary phenomenon, historical work also sheds light on the ways in which Muslim migration affected the religious landscape, at times creating a diversity of competing practice within the destination (Green, 2011)²³⁶ or leading to ritualistic and practice-based localised Islam at origin being transformed "into a more dynamic political consciousness by enlarging its geographic and ideological scope" (Karpas, 1990; p.132)²³⁷.

This is often discussed in terms of a move towards conservatism within religious practice. However, in discussing returning female Muslim migrants from the Gulf to Sri Lanka, Thangarajah (2003) suggests that while women may bring back an 'Arab' Islamic style of observance, the experience of migration "also offers them space to expand their roles as Muslim women" (p.160). Other forms of consciousness also feature. Debate on proletarianisation in India, for example, often revolves around the problematic issue of fractured solidarities. Within the working classes, along with the informal nature of

²³⁵ Wright makes an important point in that much of this work focuses on class, racial and religious distinctions and that gender is often ignored. While I have fascinating ethnography on female workers in Saharanpur, those who migrate for work are almost always male.

²³⁶ Covers Mumbai (1840-1915).

²³⁷ Discusses migration from Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire to its centre (1850-1914).

much industry (Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2009), diversity of migrant origin can be seen as contributing to a lack of unified consciousness (see: Chakrabarty, 1988). Alternatively, however, the spaces created by migrants of various backgrounds can themselves be seen as providing opportunities for organisation and the emergence of class consciousness and collective action (Chandavarkar, 1994; Bagchi, 2002).

Whilst there are a variety of moral, religious and labour solidarity based overtones to the discussion of migratory processes, the actual practice of migration in India involves other effects on both destination and origin spaces and on migrants themselves. Of late there has been a body of work criticising the common approach, usually among development agencies and governments, of discouraging migration through policies aimed at stimulating local economies, particularly in the rural context. Here contributors argue that there are a variety of potential benefits to internal migration, both for local economies, through remittances and capital investment, and within destination areas (Deshingkar, 2006; Laczo, 2008). Others argue that the experience can be potentially emancipatory and capable of allowing workers to shake off aspects of historically embedded exploitative relations. In discussing Dalit agricultural labourers, for example, Gidwani & Sivaramkrishnan (2003) describe how workers used the “migration experience to enhance their qualifications for semi-skilled work and elude the drudgery of farm work for caste landowners” (p.361). However, they go on to warn that often the “transformations of social space circular migrants enact, re-inscribe and consolidate traditional arrangements rather than undermine them” (p.362) (see also: Gardner, 1995; Kuhn, 2003). Nevertheless, for many, the potential of migration, in a small way at least, offers the hope for upward social mobility in terms of both earnings and status. The reality of migration may, of course, not match these aspirations. However, understanding such desires forms an important part of debates around migration in South Asia. De Neve (2003), for example, suggests that in the minds of “those involved [migration] often contains the most tangible promises and rewards of the modernity they imagine” (p.252).

This focuses attention back to the practice of migration. As with labour more generally, the common narrative in India tends to be one of kinship, caste or ethnic origin where

individuals exploit primordial networks based within village economies (Chakrabarty, 1989; Breman, 1994). Here, again, recent studies have shown a far more nuanced picture where networks may be founded on linkages such as friendship (De Neve, 2003), constructed (or false) kinship (Khanum, 2000) or patronage (Kuhn, 2003). Additionally, where these networks are being utilised by contractors and middlemen, skill, experience, trust and charisma, on the part of the contractor, may be as, if not more important than access to 'primordial' forms of social capital (De Neve, 2014; Mosse et al, 2002). Conditions in the place of destination and information from other returnees also plays a part in decision making. Breman (1985), for example, suggests that due to the hardships of life among migrants working as day labourers, only those of a younger age were able to cope. Rogaly et al (2003) describe how Muslim agricultural labourers were...

“...aware from their own experience and that of others that if employed by a Hindu, they would be expected to eat in the courtyard and to clean the ground where they had sat to eat with cow dung. Many of them felt this was too much of an insult and actively sought Muslim employers”

(p.295)

In the following chapters I argue that the informal and circulatory processes which underpin internal migration in India are also present in many aspects of migration to The Gulf. Whilst the requirement for papers, documentation and other bureaucracies may give a veneer of formality, much takes place beyond the realm of state apparatuses. In Pakistan, for example, the emergence of large-scale Gulf migration can be seen, not only as occurring largely outside state control, but in itself acting as a facet that “reinforced patterns of decentralised development, and diminished the role of the government as a major actor in the overall development process” (Addleton, 1992; p.202). Importantly, Addleton additionally links the willingness of individuals to leave for the Gulf with Pakistan’s history, within which migrations within the Indian subcontinent had been a common experience, both during the upheaval of partition and since²³⁸. This is further underpinned by an emphasis on the importance of *ghūmnāi* (roaming), as discussed in

²³⁸ In the latter period Addleton cites large-scale rural to urban movements.

the previous chapter, in Saharanpur and amongst Muslims elsewhere in South Asia (Marsden, 2009) and beyond (Eikelman & Piscatori, 1990).

The networks through which such movements take place may be various. However, whilst there is certainly a great deal of variety in the routes taken by migrants to the Gulf, Shah & Menon (1999) identify the use of friendship-based and other informal networks as being particularly associated with certain groups. Basing their study in Kuwait they identify disparities between migrants from different countries. Sri Lankans tend to use agents, with only around 13% obtaining work (and visas) through friends. This contrasts sharply with Pakistan where around 56% utilise friendship networks and with Bangladesh where it is 39%. Shah & Menon make the further link that this is directly related to the dominant religion of each country. Indeed, they found that of all respondents who had come through friendship links, 77% were Muslim with other groups tending much more towards the use of recruitment agents and other routes.

Whilst a large proportion of migration to the Gulf is constituted through relatively 'formal' means (brokers and agents)²³⁹, Gardner et al (2013) show around half coming through family (21%) and friends (22%)²⁴⁰ with the majority (60%) having had relatives or friends in The Gulf previously. These networks, both informal and formal, are also constituted in an explicitly historical context. Working on middle class migration to Dubai, Vora (2013), for example, argues that "current conceptions of "area" elide [...] cosmopolitan histories by considering the Gulf states as Middle Eastern, not as a part of Indian Ocean networks" (p.3)²⁴¹ and asks us to reconsider or 'provincialize'²⁴² Western-dominated interpretations of migration and its associated notions of belonging, subjectivity, governance and citizenship. Vora's contribution makes clear that we must consider, not just the emergence of migrant networks in the historical context, but also how this impacts conceptions of destination spaces. Whilst labour migration from Saharanpur to the Gulf may be relatively recent, it has been built on these older

²³⁹ Gardner et al (2013) point out the shortage of data on these actors. This he ascribes to the suspicion on the part of brokers in participating in research. This I also found an issue and I was never able to gain access to agents in Saharanpur.

²⁴⁰ Figures are for Qatar only.

²⁴¹ See also: Addleton (1992), Marsden (2009), Frantz (2008), Simpson (2006) and Osella & Osella (2008).

²⁴² Here Vora borrows from Chakrabarty's (2009) notion of 'provincializing Europe'.

networks. Indeed, it is not only informal aspects that are rooted in older cultural or networked practice. The relative formality of the *kafala* system or guest worker program (a system which restricts workers to limited periods of stay, requires them to have local sponsors and deprives them of any possibility of citizenship no matter how long their residence) is also construed in the context of older cultural practice²⁴³. Here, the original system acted to regulate sailors on pearling dhows²⁴⁴ who were seen as morally questionable and potentially polluting to the society of Gulf States²⁴⁵. Only later was this formalised in the context of increased demand for labour in the 'post-oil' era (Longva, 1997).

As with the organisation of labour in Saharanpur, migration, both internally and to the Gulf, is also a highly gendered experience. All the stories I follow here are those of men. Whilst the story of Gulfam²⁴⁶ illustrates that there are exceptions and both Mustaqim and Sajid's wives joined them for periods away within India, migration from Saharanpur is primarily a male affair. This is even more so when it comes to the Gulf. Whilst women often work in the domestic sector within Gulf households, these female recruits are primarily drawn from Sri Lanka and The Philippines as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh all institute legal restrictions on female migration (Frantz, 2008)²⁴⁷. In spite of the possibility for migration to The Gulf, it is not something undertaken by women from Saharanpur, at least not from the Muslim craft community. This again contrasts with South India where it has become more common.

Whilst this latter area of discussion is not one entered into in the following chapter, in considering broader debates on both internal and international migration Saharanpur offers a particularly relevant case. If internal migration is little explored then the sub-categories of Muslim internal migration, urban to urban internal migration and the

²⁴³ Gardezi (1995), however, critiques the notion that the 'guest worker' scheme is primarily a Middle Eastern way of regulating labour migration. As Gardezi points out both Europe and the US (i.e. the Bracero Program which regulated Mexican workers from 1942-64 and similar systems instituted in some European countries) instated guest worker programs long before the *kafala* system was formalised.

²⁴⁴ Boats.

²⁴⁵ More recently Gardner (2010) has pointed out that the system leaves workers very much at the mercy of their sponsor, thus making the experience of Gulf work heavily reliant on the relative success of this relationship.

²⁴⁶ See chapter 5.

²⁴⁷ India requires a minimum age of 30 years for female migrants to The Gulf.

linkages between internal and international migration barely register a flicker in the current literature; yet, all form primary pillars of the story in Saharanpur. Indeed, understanding the latter two areas also holds importance in understanding the first, with Muslims being the largest group of gulf migrants (www.twocircles.net, 2012) and, as mentioned previously, having a much higher likelihood of living in urban areas than members of other religions (Sachar, 2006).

Whilst interpreting these networks forms an important part of the following chapters, the main focus is on the stories of the migrants themselves. Here I aim to allow the embodied experiences of 'going outside' to give the narrative a depth that goes beyond discussion of numbers and flows. Instead I allow the voice of those involved to "depict their reality as closely as possible and let them speak for themselves" (Breman, 2008; p.28). Here I suggest that there is much to be learnt from focusing on the "narratives, affects, claims and experiences" (Vora, 2013) of migrants such as Mustaqim, Sajid, H.M. Aqeel and Gulfam, and in understanding not just where migrants go "but the conditions of life and employment when they actually get there" (Gardner & Osella, 2003; p.vi). This, as in previous chapters, is supplemented by descriptive accounts as I joined workers in other localities both within India and beyond. Here, then, I unpack the complexity of these forms of migration from Saharanpur. This involves an array of social, economic, personal, historical and contemporary factors. Whilst I have emphasised the need to link internal and international migration, it also plays out in the context of previous chapters where bonds of friendship, affection, notions of 'brotherhood' and a variety of layers of obligation act to create niches within broader structural frameworks.



Sajid with his friend Haroon in Hyderabad

Chapter Eight

From Here to There: Experiences of Internal Migration



Sajid (left) with the workers in Kamareddy & workers and owners playing cards together in Hyderabad

In this chapter I unpack complex processes that constitute migration from Saharanpur. Initially I begin by describing the history of migration from the city through the stories of those who recall the early days of migration. This process, I argue, is constituted in terms of the emergence of a 'culture of migration' (Gardner, 1995), the understanding of which is critical to interpreting the contemporary scene. Following this I turn the focus to data gathered during fieldwork which reveals the numbers, links and destinations that are currently involved in migrational activity. Finally I turn to stories of migrants themselves and descriptive account of time I spent travelling with workers and friends to other areas of the country. Building links back to the previous chapters I argue that migration must be seen not only as a structural process, but also as something that self-perpetuates and alters in emotive, informal and culturally embedded ways.

A Brief History of Migration from Saharanpur

Outward migration from Saharanpur has its own history. Many older craftsmen talked about a 'culture of migration' (Gardner, 1995) starting in the early 1980s. At this time the industry had been growing rapidly and was sucking in labour from the city and

surrounding villages, however, new legislation²⁴⁸ closing saw mills and increased competition led to a sudden drop in production. The resulting surplus of labour meant craftsmen turned to other sources of income both within and beyond the city. For some this meant a shift into informal activity, such as the case of Mustaqim's *mamu* (maternal uncle)²⁴⁹. For others it meant looking further afield. The routes and networks used were varied. Mohammed Islam made his first trip out a couple of years after Mohamed Shazad Ansari started pulling his rickshaw. This opportunity came through kinship and by accident. His *chacha* (paternal uncle) worked in Saharanpur's large cigarette factory and was transferred to Hyderabad. Upon arrival he observed the presence of a furniture industry. As his son, Islam's cousin, had recently trained in wood carving he suggested that he try for work in Hyderabad. It was through this cousin that Islam also made the trip to Hyderabad and whilst he only stayed for six months, others followed.

Whilst Islam's cousin acted as a pathfinder, others were drawn by the relocation of the industry away from Saharanpur as workshop owners and exporters sought business elsewhere. Ameer Ahmed, an elderly craftsman in his 80s, told me how his son ran away to Mumbai. He did not follow relatives but went to work for an exporter from Saharanpur:

"There are many exporters who were basically from Saharanpur but have now settled in Mumbai. If they need workers then they come here to take them. They told my son about work in Mumbai. If the worker has benefit in Mumbai then why would they come back? If they have problems though then they return. The exporter gives advance money and cost for the journey".

It was not just those originating from Saharanpur who recruited labour. The reputation and skill of craft workers also started to draw interest from elsewhere. Still today many owners in Saharanpur complain that it is hard to retain labour, as one bemoaned:

"...there is demand for workers all over India. Some workers work for me for 5000rs pm but can get 8000rs elsewhere in India so they go away. In this season I lost 50% of staff like this and have only managed to replace 25%".

These economic factors, the push of local decline and the pull of better earnings do not, however, reflect the full story. Now a common phenomenon, early migrants found a

²⁴⁸ This appears to have been the 1980 Forest (Conservation) Act.

²⁴⁹ See chapter 2.

degree of celebrity status and social capital upon return. Mustaqim told the story of his first trip out and that of a friend who went before:

“In 1986 I saw a boy who went. It was my first friend to go. Now he is dead. He went to Mumbai for work. When he came back he looked just like Amitabh Bachchan. Everyone wanted to walk with that man and to know about Mumbai. They asked him if he had met some hero, he was just like a hero and said he had seen every hero and heroine. Everyone wanted to know how the hero and heroine dressed. It was a status symbol to walk with that boy as he knew the Mumbai life. He was the first boy to go [in our group of friends]. Others went as they hoped to become a hero like him. When I came back many people asked me about Mumbai. They asked me what the life was like and what heroes were like. I told them that I saw many heroes and heroines. I went to see a shooting, the hero was Sunny Deol²⁵⁰. Now many people go so it's not special, but at that time even if a person went to Delhi it was a famous thing. People had no idea about Delhi and Mumbai but now it is common. In the old period people were simple and polite. The gents wore sandals, not shoes, and rubbed oil in their hair. They wore pyjama. People were simple at that time. It was really different if we compare to today's style. This fashion continued till 1988, after that everyone wanted to make their hair like Amitabh Bachchan, me too”²⁵¹.

Whether we choose to refer to the lure of ‘modernity’ or pick other terms, it is clear that there was more to this history of migration than economic need. Rather the stories reflect a sense of adventure and of gaining social status than just work opportunities (as with: Shah, 2006). Yet, in contrast, Mustaqim's reflection that men pre-migration were ‘simple’, which he associated with good manners and politeness, reflects a degree of ambivalence in the experience of becoming a migrant community (Ferguson, 1997).

Migration from Saharanpur: How, Where & When

Not everyone in the industry is involved in migration. However, 39.5% of those surveyed had worked outside Saharanpur. With estimates putting the population engaged in woodwork at around 250,000 (Cunningham et al, 2005), the industry is a major labour exporter. After starting work with Arshad, it didn't take long to realise the extent of outward journeys and migrant networks. Sajid and I worked out the number of cities he could phone to check for employment, they totalled at least 10. Mustaqim also

²⁵⁰ Amitabh Bachchan & Sunny Deol are Bollywood actors. Mustaqim's use of the term ‘hero’ refers to such actors and is a common descriptive in India for Bollywood stars.

²⁵¹ Adapted and edited from interview transcript.

described how “we can go in every place of India very easily. In every city you can find some Saharanpur workers. We do not have a strong link but we can ask anybody [...] we can find workers of Saharanpur very easily”. This hints at the large number of destinations travelled to (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Destinations visited at least once for wood based work by migrants from Saharanpur (by city or town)

<i>Migration Destination (multiple choice)</i>	<i>% Worker/Artisan</i>
Delhi	29
Mumbai	28
Hyderabad	25
Jaipur	22
Jodhpur	15
Bangalore	14
Chennai	11
Vijayvada	10
Ludhiana	7
Moradabad	7
Nagpur	7
Other*	54

*Covers locations visited by less than 5%. Note the large number categorised here, indicating many other destinations.

Much migration was short term (Table 8.2)²⁵². However, the type of work done varied between locations. In Rajasthan, particularly Jaipur and Jodhpur, the work was mostly handicraft, supplying the tourist trade and export markets. In Kerala the production was of furniture for domestic and export use. Hyderabad also involved furniture production but here it was mostly for local consumption, particularly for Muslim wedding dowries.

Table 8.2: Length of time spent away during most recent migration

Length of time	< 3 Months	3-6 Months	6-12 Months	1-2 Years	> 2 Years	Don't Know
%Migrant Worker/Craftsman	20	39	11	3	17	9

²⁵² This is problematic: as gathered in Saharanpur the data are less likely to cover long term absentees.

Arrangements differed. Workers returning from Kerala described large dormitories, often with labour from across India. Bachelors occupied dorms whilst those with families rented rooms in houses. In Hyderabad, owners (often from Saharanpur) provided accommodation, usually a room shared with others and generally recruited through existing workers and contacts back home. Elsewhere, larger factories, particularly those without direct links, utilised *thēkēdārs* as intermediaries in recruitment. Here, then, there is a range of networks in action (Table 8.3).

Table 8.3: Person who had recruited respondent to factory/workshop for migrant work on their most recent trip

Primary Recruiter	Relative	Friend	Owner	Thēkēdār	Other
% Worker/Craftsman	21	30	10	23	16

Understanding more about employers also forms an important part of these networks. Two areas stand out: Firstly, the tendency for employers to be Muslim (Table 8.4). Whilst potentially preferential to workers (i.e. Rogaly et al, 2003), it is also influenced by the large number of employers originating from Saharanpur (Table 8.5).

Table 8.4: Religion of those employing workers who have migrated from Saharanpur as stated by respondents regarding their most recent migration

Employer's Religion	Muslim	Hindu	Christian	Other	Don't Know	Invalid*
% Migrant Employee	56	22	4	1	12	8

*Covers those who worked on a self-employed basis during migration

Table 8.5: Origin of those employing workers who have migrated from Saharanpur as stated by respondents regarding their most recent migration

Employer's Origin (Town/City)	Saharanpur	Other	Don't Know	Invalid*
% Migrant Employee	40	40	12	8

*Covers those who worked on a self-employed basis during migration

In the case of those who worked with a *thēkēdār*, around half had been with a *thēkēdār* from Saharanpur. Sajid is one such contractor. He worked in a large factory in Gurgaon doing overlay brass work on export items. Here he describes the setup:

“As we are contractors so we pay to our workers according to salary, it is fixed. For example my workers can earn 10000rs [pm]. If I have 5 workers then I pay 50000rs in a month. If the owner pays me 1 lakh rupees then my profit is half. [If a worker has any problem then] they come to me. If they need an advance I give it or if they are ill I take them to the doctor. Also if they need clothing I can buy them. In the same case if I have some tension then I can go directly to the owner. In this system the owner is tension free and all the tension is on my head. The owner always wants work on time so he pays me piece rate. He shouts at me that he does not care how the work is finished but it should be on time. Actually it is my tension to complete the order on time and the worker always helps me.

All [the workers] are my friends. First my brother sent me for [labour] work and now I have a good relationship the Delhi factory owner. I know all the workers from my childhood, we are old friends. When I got the work in Delhi I called my friends and told them to come. Then my friends agreed and I told them the salary on the phone. I do not earn that much more, but I do not have to do hard work. It is not necessary to do work by hand, I can watch only. Sometimes I go to the owner to tell him the progress or any problems and to discuss any business deal. Actually my tension is great as I get the cheque from the owner and submit this cheque in the bank. Then I distribute the money among the workers. Sometimes if the owner rejects our order or cancels the piece then labour will never take any tension but it creates a great burden for me. This situation affects me very greatly as if this happens then my money will be cut but the labour’s money is not cut. In Saharanpur we get less money than our need, which is why we do the contractor work. Here we can earn 2-300rs [per day] but in Delhi we can earn 1000rs in a day. If we are 5-7 people then we can earn 5-7000rs in each day between us. We are 9 people in Delhi so we can earn 9000rs. Actually it is our rule that we do hard work in companies. When we sit for work we take the decision that we will keep working until we have 1000rs. That is our benefit as we cannot get this in Saharanpur”²⁵³.

Sajid’s compliment of workers was small. On this basis he is able to recruit using only his network of friends. However, those employing larger numbers described having to go around neighbourhoods and workshops in Saharanpur to recruit. Two brothers, Nasir and Raees Ahmad, described how they were now also recruiting labour in Delhi. Unlike their workers from Saharanpur, with Delhi labour they found that they had to use an additional local agent. While Sajid had little problem in recruiting labour, many

²⁵³ Edited and adapted from interview transcript.

complained of the difficulty of getting labour to return following *Eid*. Indeed, *Eid* proved to be an important event in making seasonal or circulatory orientated migration commonplace.

Whilst urban to urban migration is not influenced by the seasonal effects of agriculture seen in rural to urban or rural to rural migration, there is a seasonal aspect. This revolved around religious cycles. Migrants returned throughout the year for weddings, deaths, illness, or just to see friends and family, *Eid* formed the most significant period of return. As well as returning for festivities, *Eid* also provided an opportunity for the exchange of information on working conditions and opportunities in various locations. Both Mustaqim and Sajid took part in numerous discussions regarding possible destinations. For Mustaqim, this involved gathering information as he made plans to relocate his family. Sajid had been in Hyderabad for 5-6 months prior to *Eid* and so was both a source and seeker of information. Options were weighed up and decisions made. Sometime after *Eid* I saw off Sajid who, along with friends, was heading to Udaipur. Mustaqim set off for Mumbai with his three older sons, but received a phone call in Delhi to warn him that monsoon rain meant there was little work there. A week later I helped Mustaqim, along with his wife and children, to load their luggage onto the train as they set off with hopes for quick success in Jodhpur. As I did so, his youngest son, Ishmael, excitedly told me “*ham bahuut dur jaingai*” (we are going very far). At the age of just four he was making his first migration. I left with the promise to join them within a week. It is here, then, that I picked up the personal experiences of Mustaqim and Sajid as they became migrants.

Mustaqim: The Migrant ‘Entrepreneur’

Mustaqim’s cousin lived in the neighbourhood of Noor *Basti*. During Ramadan of 2011 we gathered at his house and discussed Mustaqim’s plans for migration. A family friend, Ishmael, had also joined us. Mustaqim contemplated the pros and cons of travelling to Mumbai to work again with Rizwan Bhai. Ishmael, however, was hesitant stating “Mustaqim Bhai, abbi dārḥī walla kē li’ē suffer khatarā hai” (for those with the beard the journey is not safe). At this time there was trouble in Muzaffarnager, on the main line

to Delhi. This acted as a reminder that migrant pathways, as with space in the city, were communally constrained. In spite of this, however, Mustaqim made various journeys throughout my time in the city. Just before his first departure, Mustaqim and I sat on the rooftop of the two rooms the family rented. Here we had celebrated Eid a couple of weeks before. Now in the dusky heat, as his children played with kites, we discussed his dreams for 'going outside'. He told me that all the "*tension is now gone*" as it will be a successful trip. He had also not given up on Mumbai but said that he may still head there after some time, depending on work. His hope was that they could make something in the region of 10,000rs a month in Jodhpur, about 4000rs more than Saharanpur.

While Mustaqim prepared to leave with his wife and children, his oldest son, Javid, had gone ahead along with other members of an informal 'crew'. This comprised people who could provide all the aspects of the wood trade: a carpenter, cutting machine operator, carver and polisher. Though small in number, Mustaqim hoped that this would allow them to establish a collective business, although he said that they would only be 'labour' as they would work on a subcontracted basis for larger producers. Javid phoned through to say all was ready for the family's arrival. I anticipated joining them in Jodhpur. However, within a few days the family returned. This was of some surprise to me as they had seemed positive and the information was that there was plenty of work there.

Upon enquiring, Mustaqim explained that conditions were bad as there was no latrine and they had to go in the fields. The work was also way below what was expected. A couple of days later we sat in the evening summer heat taking *chai* in the *sehan*. As we discussed the situation, it quickly became clear that it was not unreliable information that had been the problem. Rather, the networks of information dispersal had been too successful during *Eid*. This led to many people heading for Jodhpur. A situation that had been one of labour shortage, where the craftsmen could demand good rates, was suddenly reversed by an influx after *Eid* leading to a labour surplus.

Whilst this was a setback, Mustaqim was no stranger to this situation having made numerous migrations. Initially sent into the industry by his mother, he made his first trip out of the city around the time of Indira Ghandi's assassination, to work with his *mamu* (maternal uncle) who made carved table legs in The Punjab. After a year he returned but it was not long before he was heading out again, this time to Delhi. A workshop owner who had settled in Delhi came to the house asking for workers. After taking permission from his mother Mustaqim left. Following a couple of years in Delhi he moved on with friends to Mumbai. His migrations were always temporary and he regularly returned. After his marriage in 1992 he continued, generally leaving his family behind, and built a network of connections across the country.

These experiences were varied and he told me about the places he had visited. Amongst the best had been an earlier trip to Jodhpur. On that occasion he went to work without his family, although after marriage, and stayed for three months. He related how:

"...it was a big factory in Jodhpur and the factory owner was my friend. I never cooked there as the owner gave us food. There was also a toilet for workers in the factory. In Jodhpur [during the most recent visit] we could not find any toilet and we had to go in the jungle, so that was a big problem for us. [On the earlier trip] the people were gentle and the owner also. We could watch movies every day".

Amongst the worst was a trip to Madras. On this occasion he worked in a small workshop with eight others, all from Saharanpur. Whilst the owner had been 'a gentleman', the conditions were not to his liking:

"My friends took me for Madras. If you are my friend and you come at my home and I suggest some place to go like a garden then you go. My friend came and suggested it to me so we went there. It is the tradition or link of Saharanpur's business that a friend who has been in some place advises us for the work there. [The biggest issue] was a language problem; we cannot understand the Madras language. It was very hard as we could not even ask for one glass of water. No one can understand what we wanted there and we could not understand what they were saying to us. The English man cannot understand Hindi and the Indian cannot understand English, it is the same example in Madras for us. [Also] the food is not so good and we could only find rice and no roti. Everyone wants to eat just rice there. We cannot find roti in Madras. The temperature was also very hot for us. I cannot tolerate the temperature there".

After returning from Jodhpur, Mustaqim decided to try Ludhiana, where he already had a relative running a small business. This time I joined them from the start. Once again Javid went ahead. We set off with his second son, Abdul, on the early morning passenger train as the first chills of autumn eased the journey. Upon arrival I found Javid already working in the employ of Imtiyaz, Mustaqim's wife's sister's husband. Imtiyaz had been in the city for about ten years and had a workshop in a side street populated by woodworkers all originating from Saharanpur. Imtiyaz also employed Pal, a Sikh, on a contract basis. The craftsmen were well established, some having been there for 30 years. Although Mustaqim was happy for himself and his sons to initially work under Imtiyaz, he was keen to get his own business underway. Imtiyaz played a role in this introducing him to a neighbouring Hindu wholesaler who offered Mustaqim a place on the step of his *malding*²⁵⁴ showroom in exchange for a share of Mustaqim's profit. Javid, Abdul and I took up residence on the step displaying items that we had brought and began to work on others in the hope of some sales. It was not long, however, before the owner requested that we add some carving effects to the *maldings* and I began to wonder to what degree they would truly be doing *apna kam* (own work).

Initially we slept in the *sehan* outside the front of Imtiyaz's home, later we shifted to a rented room nearby where we slept on plyboards on the floor. The neighbourhood was a contrast from the wood *mohalas* of Saharanpur. Mainly populated by Hindus, the community had a very different feel. This also encroached into the home of Imtiyaz and his family. His wife prepared food in an open fronted *sehan* and took little notice of the rules of *pardah*, regularly visiting neighbours to chat and drink tea with head uncovered. I was conscious that this would have been difficult in Saharanpur where much more conservative attitudes existed. Still, the family seemed settled in the area and had good relations with their Hindu neighbours and friends. Work was also affected as the market for goods was different. For Mustaqim, however, the setting became a concern and he discussed shifting to a Muslim neighbourhood some 8km away. This he intended to do before the relocation of the rest of his family as he is particularly worried about the lack of a *Masjid* where the children could study the *Quran Sharif*.

²⁵⁴ Decorative wooden strips

A few days later Javid took ill with fever and Mustaqim asked me to take him back to Saharanpur. Although Javid later returned, it would be little more than a month before I got a call saying they were coming back. Later Javid and I discussed the experience:

Javid: We went and first of all we did not find a room. You were also there with us and know everything. So we slept outside and it was very cold for us. Then again we saw that there was not enough work there and I got very sick.

Tom: So did you come back with a handsome boy?

Javid: (laughing) no with a Tom! I got ill, but then after a week I went back but the work was not good. It was very low but we did it as we needed money. But it could not fulfil our daily need and we had no money in our pocket in Ludhiana. We took the room in partnership to make the rent less. Then again I was ill. There was no good work in Ludhiana as the season was off at that time. Then we said to one person that we will do work in their showroom on a profit basis.

Tom: Yes I worked with you there. He sold some wood strips.

Javid: It is a big business in Ludhiana but it was not good work so we came back. Now I hear that the work is good in Ludhiana as it is the season. Then we took a decision that we will again do work in Saharanpur so we started our own work like small centre tables.

His illness aside, Javid's explanation for the lack of work was seasonal fluctuation. This appeared as a regular feature in discussions with workers about migration. Whilst wedding season and monsoon affect the work, this is often an expression relating to events beyond control. In Saharanpur I initially got the impression that there were fixed seasons, however, as time went on separate craft workers simultaneously told me that it was 'low season' while others expressed their pleasure at having plenty as now was 'season time'. This sense of 'season', therefore, was more a reflection of uncontrollable market changes or periods of unemployment, than of regular annual fluctuations.

Although Mustaqim and I discussed a return to Ludhiana he also contemplated other locations including Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bareilly. The family made further attempts. An effort to go to Mumbai was cancelled as they could not recruit a carpenter due to many having already gone elsewhere. They also made it to Hyderabad but again returned as they had not found sufficient work. It became something of a joke in Saharanpur as they regularly said 'goodbye' and we replied "*tikay, aglai hafta milaingai*"

(okay, see you next week). Mustaqim took the various attempts in his stride and I was endlessly impressed by their ability to ride out the costs, although he did tell me that they had suffered financial loss. Eventually he decided that these attempts were futile and after arranging money²⁵⁵ from Kamal ji, restarted business one gully away from where I had first met him.

Sajid: The Migrant Worker

My first trip with Sajid was to Hyderabad and took place during *Ramadan*, prior to *Eid*. Sajid's working arrangements reflected the data presented earlier in this chapter. He worked in a small workshop with Muslims owners originating from Saharanpur. The workshop was spread across three sites in the neighbourhood of Mallepally which was heavily populated by those from Saharanpur²⁵⁶. The workshops were run by three brothers, Shanwas, Dilshad and Shamshad²⁵⁷. Their father came to the city in 1983, being amongst those early migrants, and initially worked as labour in the city's growing furniture industry. He gradually built a business, using his contacts in Saharanpur to bring stock and recruit labour. After 30 years he returned to Saharanpur, saying that 'it is where my heart was', leaving his three adult sons to run the business. Although the brothers were born and bred in Hyderabad they identified themselves as being 'of Saharanpur'. Indeed, on a later visit Shamshad explained to me that he felt South Indians were not as good as those in the north as they 'think only of themselves', while North Indians feel 'only love'. Dilshad explained that 90% of their labour came from Saharanpur as locals were unable to do this work. When I arrived, there were eight young men in the workshops, all from Saharanpur except Javid, who hailed from Kanpur.

As with Mustaqim, Sajid was an experienced migrant. His first trip had been as a young boy of about 14. He went to Ramgarh in Rajasthan:

"My friend was working there, I went with him. I spent 4 months but it was not good for me and my health got poor so I came back. Next I went to Kerala for 3 months but the food was very bad and I did not like it. The food system is very different from ours, they did not like roti and their vegetable

²⁵⁵ Without interest.

²⁵⁶ People suggested 10,000 but it's hard to judge.

²⁵⁷ As mentioned in chapter 6.

is raw coconut. The water was good in Kerala but not the food. In Rajasthan though the water was very bad. The taste was very different; it was '*kara pani*' (salty water). No one can drink a glass of water if we mix salt in it so how can we drink that water. We believe that water is very important; if you go somewhere and the water is not suited then you get ill. We like the water of Saharanpur. We never get ill from this water as it is sweet. I never suited the water of Rajasthan and fell ill from it.

In Kerala we had a room and did our work in the room which was on rent organised by a Saharanpur person. He was based in Kerala but came back to Saharanpur to take some workers. I had no relationship with him. He just wanted some workers so we went there. I found this work as I had one friend and that friend also had one friend in Kerala. At that time I was in Saharanpur and my friend told me, during Eid, that his friend wants some workers in Kerala. So my friend asked if I wanted to go and I agreed. We made some contact with my friend's friend. Then we went with him to go there. The room was near the factory and so we could bring the work in the room. It was easy for us. The owner always sent the work at the room. The main problem was that we had to make food by ourselves.

After this I worked in Saharanpur for 3 years in a small workshop on contract basis. Then I came to Hyderabad for work and spent 6 years [not continuously]. The food was good and the water was sweet. At that time my ten friends were living in Hyderabad. They phoned me and told me that the work is very good here. I had one friend in Saharanpur. He was a carpenter and we decided to go together. The ten friends were living in Dilshad's house and Dilshad sent the money for the travel. Sometimes I came back after 6 months but sometimes after 1 year. I just came back for Eid and sometimes for marriages. Once I came back for my marriage and did not go back for a long time. I spent 3 years with my wife but before some time ago I went back there. Sometimes they [the owners] would give me 5000-10000rs advance to come back. When I am in Hyderabad I live with friends in the room Dilshad provides. It is mostly ok but sometimes we fight, like when we tease some person or called them a donkey then the fighting would start from a joke. Like when one boy made a joke about another boy that he is becoming a body builder, then the fight started. If some boy did not do his cleaning work, or if some boys want to sleep and others do not so this is the main reason for fighting. Now I have no problem living with friends. When we are together we can feel nice as we can share our secrets and problems. It is rare that we fight with our friends otherwise we live with love. Like in Dilshad's factory you can see that we live happily with our friends"²⁵⁸.

Sajid's complaints about food and water were common. Nizimmudin Ansari, described "...the water there is always stale so the taste is not so good in Rajasthan. We are in the

²⁵⁸ Edited and adapted from interview transcript.

habit of getting fresh water; you know that in Saharanpur the water is so good. The stale water is always hot and it cannot refresh us". The emphasis on food and water holds much greater weight in understanding labour migration than merely being a matter of taste. We know from a variety of contributions that what people eat and drink, particularly in South Asia, forms an important part of communal and regional identity and is often "imbued with symbolic and cosmological meanings" (Mookerjee, 2008; p.58). For Muslims the consumption of meat, for example, can be seen either as a source of strength, by those within the community, or as a symbol of violence and pollution by some outside (Chigateri, 2008)²⁵⁹. Likewise within Hindu social structure it has long been a means of emphasising Brahmin dominance (Osella & Osella, 2008) or, through altering dietary habits, a means of reflecting the changing status of a caste group (Michelutti, 2008). For workers, too, there is a certain aesthetic to food. Sajid and his friends saw milk and eggs as being a source of strength and power, both for gym going activities and work, so others find similar notions in other forms of consumptive practice. In contrast, Osella & Osella (2008) detail how consumption of 'polluting' items, such as alcohol or chemicals, is seen by some *Dalits* (Hindu caste) as a source of strength.

Sajid's migration history also reveals a dominance of recruitment through friendship networks. These networks, however, go further than friendship between workers and may also involve factory owners and *thēkēdārs*. This was the case in Hyderabad where the three brothers regularly spent their evenings playing cards in the workers quarters, enabled by their similar social background and standing. As well as providing a social activity and a break from family life, it was also a way of bonds and keeping workers. Although partly instrumental there was also genuine affection. On a later visit Shamshad, for example, told me how much he missed one of the workers, Musharraf, as he was his favourite person to go and drink beer with.

Musharraf was the senior and most flamboyant member of the group. Tall and handsome, he spent most of his adult life migrating as a woodcarver. He told me that for him the initial motivation was to get away from family, in particular his father. For

²⁵⁹ As Chigateri points out, this is particularly so for beef where either real or supposed instances of 'cow slaughter' have led to discrimination and even violence.

Musharraf the experience of being a migrant went hand in hand with a sense of 'freedom' as he could do things his father would otherwise "beat me for". This included opportunities for drinking, although he abstained during *Ramadan*. Whilst he was conscious of aspects of religious observation this did not extend to completing *roza* (fast) and he happily took lunch each day. Many of the workers were fairly lax in their approach to observing *Ramadan*. However, the owners insisted that they did not work past 5.30pm and were therefore available for *namaaz*. Others, too, had reason to opt for the migratory life beyond economic desires. Haroom met me, along with Sajid, from the train. He had been in Hyderabad for some time and lived separately with his wife and young child. He sported a tattoo²⁶⁰ of the letter 'S' on his left shoulder, his wife's initial, which he explained had been done prior to their marriage. The marriage was also his reason for migration. It was a cross *biraderi* love marriage for which they had eloped. It angered both families, particularly her father who threatened to kill him. Things settled somewhat following the birth of the child, so much so that his wife was able to return to Saharanpur during *Ramadan*. Haroom intended to make this his last time working away, although he eventually decided to return again to Hyderabad after Eid.

The early finish to work during *Ramadan* allowed more time for socialising than would usually be the case. Following the breaking of *roza* (fast) with fruit and dates, most of us made our way to the local *Masjid*. After this there was time for a meal, conversation and banter. The room was small and we laid simple blankets on the concrete floor for sleeping. There was a single toilet space for both, latrine and a bucket shower. Whilst the facilities were basic, the atmosphere was intimate and relaxed. The group were close and friendships ran deep. Banter and jokes formed a part of relations between the men but there was a great deal of physical warmth and companionship. Musharraf sat cuddling up with Javid, who he nicknamed '*gora*' (pale/white) due to his pale complexion, and joked "he is my best friend, girlfriend and wife".

The workshop in which Sajid was located was in a small backstreet behind a large steel gate and consisted of a partly covered courtyard filled with unused wood and half-

²⁶⁰ Having a tattoo is considered *haram* in Islam.

finished furniture items. His *tala* (work space) was under a corrugated roof from which hung a fan. Sajid added carving to panels, then passed these to the carpenter for fitting, before a couple of polishers finished the item. In the meantime, I practiced basic designs that Sajid sketched out for me onto pieces of scrap wood. The completed items were noted by the workers in a small book which each kept. Later these books were checked by Dilshad, with piece rates often being a source of debate. Musharraf complained that Dilshad often gave a lower rate than agreed. Dilshad, in turn, accused Musharraf of taking an advance and leaving without returning it. Whilst there is not the class divide present in large factories, around the areas of advance money and payments relations did become conflicted.

Eid brought an exodus back to Saharanpur. The period after *Eid* proved challenging for the brothers as they struggled to compete with others to retain labour. On a visit some months later Shamshad complained "*Mazdoori log jesse kabuter, woh ider uder jatei hai. Unko pakarnai bahut mushkil hai*" [Workers are like pigeons, they go here and there. To catch them is very hard]. Following *Eid* it was some time before people started to leave Saharanpur, citing a local expression "*agar jeb mei paisai hai, Eid kutam nahi hota hai*" [Eid doesn't finish as long as I have money in my pocket]. Eventually though, Sajid set off to Udaipur with a separate group of friends. As with Mustaqim, however, it did not meet expectations. Whilst these issues partly stemmed from food and water, the main problem was the work manufacturing Hindu *murtis* (small shrines). This, Sajid felt, was *haram* (against Islamic law/practice). Whilst some stayed, happy to produce *murtis*, he returned. Sajid then spent a month working for a Hindu factory owner in Chandigarh before heading to Kamareddy, a town 3 hours north of Hyderabad, where I joined him.

Again we worked with friends who were already there. More followed. One, Waseem, came from the workshops of the brothers in Hyderabad through his connection to Sajid. The workshop was small, consisting of an open yard with a tarpaulin-covered area on one side. We slept on site in a room at the rear. The labour force consisted of three carpenters and two polishers, with Sajid the only carver. Whilst most ranged from mid-teens to mid-twenties, one worker, Suheel, brought his young brother. Waseem was 13 and working away for the first time. He did not receive money directly as he was learning

the polishing trade. Instead, his labour contributed to the piece rate earnings of his older brother who provided him a small amount of 'pocket money'.

Unlike Hyderabad, here the owner, Mohammed Javid, had no historical link to Saharanpur. He had started out as a wood wholesaler but when his business went bust he set up in furniture production with a local carpenter. Five years before he was approached by a man called Tariq, who had come with a small team from Saharanpur. Javid realised that the new workers had higher skills and worked faster and longer than locals. He split with his partner and became solely reliant on labour from Saharanpur. Whilst Tariq and his team moved he retained a network of contacts in Saharanpur originating from the initial group.

With *Ramadan* now a distant memory and the wedding season in full swing, work was constant. Sajid allowed me to do some basic carving on final pieces while he did the complex parts. We worked long hours to complete orders. Still there was time for a quick visit to the gym each morning but now we often worked until midnight. Javid reassured his workers by saying that it was not long until the end of the wedding season, reminding them of the money they were earning. They received piece rate but didn't take the full money each week, preferring instead to take 500-1000rs for expenses, extracting the rest as a lump sum when departing. Sajid felt that although there was more to do in Hyderabad, Kamareddy is a better setup. This was largely down to *kharch* (cost). Here there were fewer temptations and food was cheaper.

In fact, Sajid saw Kamareddy as a place to make a permanent location and decided to bring his wife, telling me "*my wife can live happily with me [here] as the atmosphere is good for ladies*". Sajid's wife hailed from a village and had never been on a train, let alone a journey of length. He brought her in early spring and took a separate room on rent. However, she found migrant life hard and after six weeks he brought her back explaining "*my wife did not suit the water of Kamareddy, she got ill. The water is good for me but not for my wife, this depends on our blood system. The water was not digestible for my wife*". Whilst the story of water appears again, it was not the only

reason. This became clear when Sajid told me “Mei apko uncle banaunga” [I will make you an uncle]. To great jubilation, it was discovered that his wife was pregnant.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored a variety of migration stories. There is no single narrative associated with experiences of ‘going outside’. There are, though, common themes that appear in the tales. Tightly bound friendships interplay with migrational activity. *Thēkēdārs* recruit through friendship networks. Workers become ‘informal *thēkēdārs*’ in the recruitment of others, further emphasising the fluidity of various actors and the blurring of worker/contractor roles. Place of origin played a part with friendships forged in childhood or formed in the workshops of Saharanpur. In the wood *mohallas* great emphasis was placed on the importance of such networks, yet it was not just in the city but also in ‘outside’ spaces where they were forged. Wasim, for example, at thirteen years of age was away for the first time. When I first met him in December of 2011 he had recently arrived. Shy and unsure of himself, he was surrounded by experienced older workers. Yet, when I visited again in April 2012 not only had he grown, but he was now cocky and sure of himself. Without family, it was this group of young men who were influencing and shaping his character, as well as providing companionship and affection.

Relationships between owners and workers often proved close and informal. Whilst owners of large factories in Saharanpur lived separate lives others, such as the brothers in Hyderabad, were not divided by class to the same degree. This stemmed from their position as small producers who were only a generation away from their labour. Whilst there was genuine fondness, there is also a degree to which nurturing such relations enabled greater control over labour by creating a sense of obligation. In discussing male relations in family businesses, Harriss-White (2001), for example, suggests:

“...relations between men are carefully, almost ‘naturally’, constructed so as to nurture cooperation and control - control over other men within and outside the household. It is by means of this control over men that control over capital is concentrated. Co-operation conceals control”.

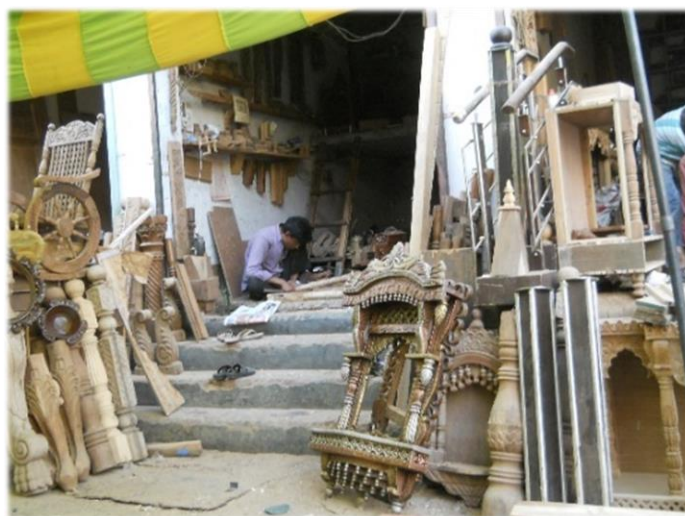
(p.6)

In any case, these bonds, whether formed at home or 'outside', ran deep and acted as an important 'pull' in the destination choice of migrants. However, they were also fluid and changing. The group in Hyderabad, for example, was quick to fragment following *Eid*, with members heading to different locations. For workers there was an element of power in this as they could withdraw their labour and relocate. There were also more basic considerations, such as the taste of water or the absence of *roti*. In addition, moral and religious considerations interplayed here, such as Sajid's concern about making *murtis* or Mustaqim's worries about the absence of a *Masjid*. Whilst giving a degree of power, the flexible nature of workers' lives also meant that they bore a great deal of risk, particularly when working for piece rate where drops in orders meant less income. Failed migrations were common, whilst some received an advance others had to shoulder the loss and bear vulnerability themselves. Migrations were often short term. However, there were those who chose permanent settlement, although links back to Saharanpur remained strong and old networks were not discarded. Others did not settle but instead chose a life of migration. Musharraf, for example, headed off to Assam after Hyderabad and described how, with the exception of *Eid*, he was always moving from place to place, combining migrant work with *ghūmnāi* (roaming). For Musharraf life was not so much about being a temporary or permanent migrant, but rather about being a transient and continuous migrant.

Choices regarding migration also changed with life cycle. Migrants were often young and unmarried. However, marriage did not necessarily mean an end. This, however, can cause tensions. Towards the end of the fieldwork I was invited to the wedding of Mustaqim's youngest brother. Prior to marriage he spent years working in *Surat* and made the decision to return with his new wife. Whilst his wife seemed quite cheerful about this, his mother was not so pleased and complained that he should now be settled and not going elsewhere. Other changes occurred over longer periods. Mustaqim, for example, described how in his younger days he would often work for *thēkēdārs* (contractors) or under *maliks* (owners) but now preferred *apna kam* (own work) as he was seeking to establish a business drawing on the increasing age and skills of his children. The support of his five sons allowed Mustaqim to split the family labour across localities and to provide a larger and more reliable labour force in destination spaces.

The comings and goings of migrants add a further layer of connections. The complexity of these circulations results in shifting subjectivities and perspectives. It also illuminates the interconnected nature of Muslim neighbourhoods which, whilst experiencing degrees of ghettoization, are linked to other religiously defined enclaves across the country and to non-Muslim spaces. Physical mobility, however, does not necessarily equate with social mobility. Indeed, the two case studies focused on in this chapter illustrate that the terms ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘worker’ often embody little distinction. As Breman (1996) points out “what at first sight seems like self-employment, and which also presents itself as such, often conceals sundry forms of wage labour (p.8).

In addition to these considerations, the objective of this chapter has also been to illustrate a narrative which moves beyond that of the ‘marginalised Indian Muslim’ and to bring focus onto the highly connected nature of the community. The chapter has considered spaces of work and migration, spaces which play an important part in the socialisation of those involved, spaces that are highly influential in creating strong bonds of friendship and even ‘brotherhood’ (in a constructed sense). Such complex and emotive networks, however, are not limited to the borders of India. As argued in the ‘interval’, which preceded this chapter, internal and external migration are linked. Many migrants utilise informal networks held familiar during internal migrations (see also: Gardner et al, 2013) to negotiate migration further afield. It is to emerging and older forms of Gulf migration that the following chapter now turns.



The shop of Mustaqim's relative in Ludhiana

Chapter Ten

From India to the Gulf: Stories of Emerging and Older Gulf Migration



Workers play cricket in front of Dubai's skyscrapers

In this chapter I explore migration to the Gulf. I argue that the migratory processes, networks and experiences present in internal migration also substantially underpin international migration. After a brief scene-setting section describing my arrival in the labour camps, I begin with a focus on the history of Gulf migration from the city. Here I argue that, despite being a relatively recent phenomenon, networks link into older maritime connections of trade and a long history of interrelations between the Gulf and India. Following this, I explore the ways in which Gulf migration is reshaping North Indian Cities, in particular Muslim neighbourhoods. In the third section I focus on how the Gulf is seen from Saharanpur and emphasise that it is not viewed homogenously. Instead, different Gulf countries are seen, both morally and practically, in differing ways by migrants and non-migrants in the city. Next I turn to the stories of returnees. These tales are varied. Some involve success and triumph, others failure and humiliation. They are also told through different idioms depending on the age and situation of the teller. Finally, I turn back to the descriptive account with which the chapter opens, and focus on the stories of workers in, and my own observations of, the labour camps.

Arrival: Mussafah City

Finding *Gulfam* was not easy as I struggled with the building Gulf heat in May of 2012. My newly acquired UAE sim-card was playing up and our calls were often cut off. I knew he was somewhere in the sprawling sub-metropolis of *Mussafah*, the vast industrial area on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi. Having made the trip from *Shahjah*, a neighbouring emirate, I could only think to join the line dominated by South Asians at the central bus station. Sure enough, when the bus did pull in, and the scramble for seats began, I was relieved to see its board displaying '*Mussafah Worker's City*'. Still unable to reach *Gulfam*, I stayed on the bus through a maze of construction yards full of heavy equipment and roughly hewn dormitory blocks, until the end of the line. Obtaining numbers of migrant workers in the area is difficult. However, the *Gulf News* (2006) describes "Al Mussafah [as an] area where an estimated 12,000 workers often share cramped rooms containing up to 20 beds" (cited by Keane & McGeehan, 2008). Recently it has been earmarked for development, which may see the relocation of migrant labour elsewhere (Bajić-Brković & Milaković, 2011).

A crackly conversation allowed me to give *Gulfam* my location and I hunkered down in the shade available as the afternoon sun radiated overhead. It was not long, however, before I started to attract attention. First, a couple of men from Hyderabad stopped to ask what I was doing. Then four men from the Pashtun region of Pakistan approached me and were thrilled when I answered in *Urdu*. My presence was clearly unusual. They asked about the UK and what brought me to *Mussafah*. I explained my time in Saharanpur and how I had come to meet a friend. They asked me how *Pashtuns* were seen in Britain and my views on the war in Afghanistan. I, too, was curious. They told me they were working in the construction sector. They came from the same village and had found work in the Gulf through a co-villager who had travelled previously. One, Ajmal, had been there for ten years, with only brief returns to await a new visa. As with the majority of labour workers in the Gulf, they were locked into two-year contracts after which they could stay for another year if they wished before having to return. Many of these men, as with others, came time and time again, sending money back to families while fulfilling various contracts.

As one hour turned into two, and then three, I watched comings and goings at the small, hot and dusty bus stand. Occasionally chatting, then sitting and observing. It felt like the whole of South Asia was passing through the kerbside of scrub and sand: Pashtun and Sindhi men appeared wearing distinctive *topis* (caps) cut to shape at the front. Observant Indian and Pakistani Muslims exited vehicles. Several buses were driven by Sikhs. A man I presumed to be Filipino, in shorts and *chapals* (sandals), kicked the dust idly. Legions of men in trousers and shirts, with hard hats and *tiffins* (lunch tins), chatted in *Hindi, Malayan, Tamil, Urdu* and *Bengali* as they were disgorged from streams of transport returning from the city. Whilst I found the scene fascinating the heat was becoming oppressive. I was grateful when, after more crackly phone calls and help from a Chennai born taxi driver, I finally met Gulfam and we headed together for the dormitory block which he called home.

A Brief History of Gulf Migration: Old or New Connections?

As suggested in the 'interlude' section proceeding these concluding chapters, linkages between India and the Gulf have a history embedded in maritime and religious networks. Yet Saharanpur is not Gujarat's *dhow* building coast (Simpson, 2003), Mumbai's heaving port (Green, 2011) or one of Kerala's merchant-filled towns (Osella & Osella, 2003). Far from the ocean, its history is not intertwined as are these other localities. Whilst Afghan kings and Persian princes may have passed through during long forgotten conquests²⁶¹, migration to the Gulf is a contemporary phenomenon. This does not mean, however, that older networks played no part. Indeed, much early Gulf migration took place as the result of internal movements, which, in turn, led to connections being made with networks established through maritime trade elsewhere. Just as the Muslim population of coastal cities built on a shared religious identity with Arab traders, so Saharanpur's Muslim craft workers built networks with their cohorts in port towns. In so doing, routes to the Gulf opened up before the emergence of brokers and agents who now facilitate a part.

²⁶¹ See chapter 3.

H.M. Aqeel was just one of several people I met during my time in Saharanpur who had a long story of work in the Gulf. H.M. Aqeel was the father of a friend of my friend Shahid. Shahid, was contemplating work in Saudi and also had questions for Mr Aqeel. We drove on my motorbike the short distance from Shahid's home. The property consisted of a shop selling foodstuffs attached to a house of reasonable proportions. After greeting us in the street, Mr Aqeel invited us in and while he arranged tea his son, who was in the *Jamaati* line, talked to me about Islam and suggested that I should watch Peace TV²⁶². His father's earnings had allowed him to dedicate time to study in the *Madrassa*. Upon his return H.M. Aqeel began to tell his story:

"I first went [to Mumbai] in 1978. One person, Abuzar, worked with me in Saharanpur, now he is in Qatar. He went to Mumbai and worked near JJ Hospital. The owner's name was Ali Hasan. That owner sent Abuzar back to Saharanpur to bring workers. Now the system is different and we do not need links for work. If we have the owner's address we go directly. Now we do not need any person.

Mumbai was like Dubai at that time; everyone wanted to ask questions [about it]. They asked about climate and lifestyle. They wanted to know the problems also. Nowadays if anyone goes away it is not so big. At that time no one went to the Gulf and certainly not by airline. Only two people [from Saharanpur], Tahir and Tayyub -they were brothers- went by ship to Dubai.

I got the work in Mumbai through a friend. In Mumbai, there's one place called Gram Bhavan. There I started work. The place was owned by Ali Hasan, but the work was our own. It was my responsibility to buy wood, labour and electricity but the profit was 50/50 with the owner. I spent 8 years in this way and earned good money. Then a customer came from Qatar. His name was Abdul Noor. I was not there but the owner gave me his card and told me that I could meet them in the Taj Mahal Hotel. They needed two artisans and if I was interested I could go. It was my good luck that I had made my passport, but I was fearful as I thought they could hurt me. But I could see that people who came back from the Gulf had many good clothes and money in their pocket. It is human weakness that we also want a life like that so I went.

I put on my best clothes and went into the Taj Mahal hotel. The gatekeeper did not want to let me in. He asked me lots of questions. I gave him the card and told him my purpose. He called that party and asked them if they wanted to meet me. They said 'yes' and I was allowed inside. They asked me lots of questions about my experience. They told me that I would be

²⁶² An Islamic TV station, widely available in South Asia, which broadcasts in Urdu.

doing carving and other work. They asked my address and I gave them my card.

Sometime later they came to our shop and watched everything we did. When they were satisfied with my work they said that I could go. I talked about the salary in Qatar. It was my demand that I wanted 1500 Riyal in Qatar. They offered 1000 Riyal but said if the work was good it would increase. I rejected their proposal as I would have to leave my country and family for little benefit. People can leave their family but only if they find benefit. At last the agreement was fixed for 1200 riyal. Finally, then, I left Mumbai to go to Qatar”²⁶³

H.M. Aqeel was not alone in having a long history of migration to the Gulf. Umar Din, Abdul Gaffar and Mohammad Yunis, the highly skilled group of craft workers opposite Arshad’s shop, also had long experiences. All had previously worked in Muscat and Bahrain and returned up to 15 years previously. A couple of kilometres away near the *Islamia Inter College* I met Anis Ansari, now in his early 60s. He told me in colourful language of his first trip to Saudi in the 1980s. As with Mr Aqeel, he found work through migration to Mumbai where he was recruited by visiting Arabs. The specific skill possessed by Saharanpur’s woodworkers created a particular niche demand from Gulf companies and others. In turn, their recruitment led to the contracting of others. Anis Ansari, for example, explained how he had been asked to contact friends from Saharanpur directly as his Gulf employer sought to gain access to networks of similarly skilled labour.

Imaginations and Departures: Roads to the Gulf

Gulf migration is having an impact on towns and cities across North India. It is often the Muslim population who are identified with experiencing both the benefits of remittance money and impacts of absentee family. In a recent article the *Sunday Times of India* ran a story about the town of Azamgarh in Eastern U.P. As with Saharanpur the town has a large Muslim minority:

“...people of this town have been going out for more than 100 years. Initially, they travelled to places like Malaysia and Singapore. In the 1960s and 70s, they went to Bombay. Then came the great Gulf rush. Those who managed

²⁶³ Edited and adapted from interview transcript.

to get out of the ghettos not only made a life for themselves, but also pumped money into the town. With the state almost absent from all spheres of life, it's the remittances from migrants which are sustaining and fuelling growth here [...] "Almost every family has someone working outside. It's because of the money sent by them that the Muslim community has made some progress in education and jobs," says Umar Siddique, a researcher from Shibli Academy. "Now our boys go out for education and good jobs and not for menial work. That has made some people jealous and they are now trying to implicate young boys in false cases²⁶⁴."

The money is visible in certain pockets here and there. In a town where every government building looks like a relic [...] there are some new ones. These are mostly private schools, hospitals and madrassas. Local intelligence officials talk of Salafi winds sweeping the area because of financial and moral support from the Gulf. But the people see the madrassas as educational institutes, particularly those which provide vocational training"

Saxena, *Sunday Times of India* (July 24th 2011; p.8)

Here the narrative is one of Gulf migration providing a route out of the ghetto and away from persecution. The article finishes with the line "for those who want to avoid trouble and mention in police records, there is only one shot at redemption: the escape from Azamgargh" (p.8). Whilst escape may be a driving force for some, the tale in Saharanpur is more complex. Stories and experiences are varied. As with Azamgargh, the effects are highly visible in Saharanpur. Large new houses are appearing in the Muslim *mohallas* and migrant's children are attending schools that were out of reach of those working locally.

Whilst people's imaginings of the Gulf may not be based on historical links, there is a sense of its significance in the minds of people in Saharanpur. These images differ greatly depending on the Gulf country being discussed. As a wholesaler describes:

"If they go to Saudi they come back with high moral and religious values but if they go to other parts of the Gulf then they return with very low values. Either way they don't want to work in this industry as they consider the wages to be too low and look instead to go back outside. They don't invest in this industry either, but just buy property and try to go abroad again".

²⁶⁴ The article earlier discusses the targeting of the Muslims in Azamgargh by security services.

There is a degree of reality in these imaginings even if they may be somewhat amplified by those creating them. H.M. Aqeel again takes up the story with regard to his own experience of migrant life in various countries:

“Dubai is a free port so it is not strict but Saudi is very strict. Qatar is also not so strict but not as easy as Dubai. It is in the middle. In Saudi many things are banned. When it is Namaaz time then a big van comes and the owner gives us instruction to go for Namaaz. It is the company who send the van to make sure all the workers go. There is no alcohol in Saudi, life is simple and straight and we cannot do any free thing. Some people who go to Dubai want to drink alcohol and do bad things. [...] Only some people who go outside are successful. The reason is that if a person earns 500rs in Dubai then he can drink and use 500rs in bad things. He never thinks about tomorrow and never thinks about family. He never saves 200rs for his family. He just does some wrong things in Dubai. But many people are very polite and if they earn 2000rs in a day then they save good money for the family and not for their own amusement. A worker can only work until about 58 years and then his physical power will go down. If his lifestyle is healthy and he eats fruit and drinks milk then he can work long, but a worker never finds this lifestyle. Many live a bad lifestyle and drink, smoke the hashish and cigarette. So the machinery of a human body goes down day by day due to these bad habits. As they do this and also do not eat good food and work too much then the life is short. Many people drink too much tea or have illegal sex so they maybe only live to 40 years”²⁶⁵.

Mr Aqeel’s story reveals two interwoven strands when discussing these different destinations. The first is wrapped up with a sense of morality, the good migrant who puts family first and sacrifices his own comfort, versus the bad, who seeks opportunity for fulfilment and self-pleasure. This he links with how the consumption of certain foods, drink and carnal pleasures, have a negative impact on the body of the worker. In his terms, to be a strong and good worker, lifestyle and consumption patterns are important. This is also a feature of life in Kamareddy, where Sajid and the others consumed milk, fruit and eggs after morning visits to the gym, both to aid the physique and to give them ‘strength’ for work.

In the second strand Mr Aqeel links these differing lifestyles with the contrasting spaces of Saudi and Dubai. The image of Saudi goes beyond that of rules under which workers

²⁶⁵ Edited and adapted from interview transcript.

live. One craftsman who works in the gully parallel to *Kamil Wally Gully*, Afsar Malik, describes his image of Saudi as a place where “...everyone is a *malik*. In Saudi no people work in the mazdoori line but all are rich”. Wealth differences aside, Saudi also features prominently in people’s minds as the centre of Islam. As the location of *Mecca* and *Medina* Saudi is, understandably, idealised by many in Saharanpur. The strength of this image has been enhanced by the circulations of international *Jamaats*, discussed in previous chapters.

It was Saudi that proved the most common destination among those I met in Saharanpur. This may simply be tied up with economic demand. However, as the location of *Mecca*, *Medina* and other holy sites, there was a further appeal. Although most of those migrating for work are unlikely to be able to complete *Hajj*, there is usually the chance for *Umrah*²⁶⁶. Shahid expressed his desire to go, not just for work, but also to visit the holy sites and describes his image of Saudi as a place of high moral values and respectability²⁶⁷. Mustaqim also had Saudi in mind for his eldest son Javid. Whilst he was in two minds about the benefits of working overseas, he saw Saudi as the preferred location if Javid was to be sent, partly as he had some friends already working there, but also as he felt that Javid would learn more about Islam and be able to make *Umrah*²⁶⁸. Mustaqim explained that, as with migration in India, it would be easy to arrange work for Javid through those they knew who were already working in Saudi. This he saw as preferential to using an agent as the process would be too costly:

“You know the agent is expensive and we do not have money for this. I do not think it matters for the work as the agent can also arrange good jobs but it is better for Javid to go to some factory where there is one person already as otherwise he could be alone in some place”.

Whilst not necessarily seeing a greater risk in using an agent, Mustaqim was concerned about Javid having someone who could inaugurate him into the workplace and provide a point of social connection.

²⁶⁶ Visiting of the holy sites of Mecca that, unlike Hajj, can be performed at any time of year. The Umrah is seen as increasing one’s religious standing and closeness to Allah. However, it does not hold the same weight as Hajj.

²⁶⁷ Shahid went to work in Saudi in 2013 and told me via Facebook: “By Tha Allah gress. I had been given a chance to make Umrah ... and I am looking for Umrah next month as well... pray for me” (printed with kind permission).

²⁶⁸ Werbner (1999) discusses similar considerations, citing the example of an informant who abandoned his job in Dubai to complete Hajj. This in spite of the risk of being deported when he came back to Dubai or, even worse, ending up jobless and trapped. Yet for Werbner’s informant these religious considerations proved more important.

This was not merely based on supposition. Mohammad Abdul ran a small shop having returned after making several trips to the Gulf. He explained that both he and his eldest son went together for work in Saudi. Their work was arranged through an agent and they were told they would work in a furniture factory. Whilst this was the case for Abdul, the owner's family decided to utilise his son as a gardener in a farmhouse they kept many miles from the factory. Abdul explained how his son was alone there and often cried to him about having no one with him. After three months Abdul went to visit his son and upon seeing his condition pleaded with the factory owner that he should be allowed to return with him. Eventually it was agreed that after one month they would get another gardener and allow his son to move to the factory where he would not be alone. His son has since returned to the Gulf but Abdul explained that this time he had made arrangements of an informal manner with people who the family knew through their *mohalla* to ensure that he would not be in a condition of *akēlāpan* (loneliness) again. This preference for informal channels of migration hints that a formalisation of migration processes between South Asia and the gulf may not necessarily result in benefits for workers who actively avoid formality, instead finding greater security in networks comprising friends, relatives and others.

Departures, though, can be risky and even those who utilise informal means of securing work or checking working conditions are by no means secure in the result. As Abdul Malik, a petty producer in Khatakheri, explains:

“One of my sons tried to go to Abu Dhabi to work but had to turn back at the airport. He was told he was going for driving work but when he got to Delhi they said that his visa was for building work. He did not want to go as this was a cheat. We had arranged it through relatives in the gulf with a contact they had there, but even this was not enough to stop the fraud. It cost us a big loss of 1.25 Lakh”.

In spite of Abdul's and his son's attempts to circumvent agents and the uncertainty this can bring, conditions of employment were still not what was hoped for. Whilst utilising networks of friends or relatives may enable workers to check conditions and arrangements, they are by no means a guarantee of success.

After Return: “It is not a beneficial system for us, but it is not so harmful either”

The looser morals of Dubai may appeal to some, and certainly there is also plenty of demand for labour in the UAE. However, the tendency for larger numbers to head to Saudi is not uncommon among Muslim migrants beyond Saharanpur. Rahman (2011), for example, cites figures suggesting that Saudi is the most popular destination for migrants from Bangladesh, with a little over a third of all Gulf-bound migrants heading there. Whilst this may be in part due to demand for labour and other economic factors, the image of Saudi is important in the decision-making processes of potential migrants. Of course the reality may not always match the pre-imagined ideal. I met Shamshad Ahmed in Shanawas’s shop, across the road from Arshad. He was initially critical of his experience in Saudi, saying:

“I was in Saudi for two years. I was working in Mumbai about nine years ago, when I was about 23, and was approached by a couple of tourists from Saudi who asked me if I wanted to go for work. I thought this was a good idea but I had to raise around 24,000rs for agent fees. I managed to get the money together from friends and relatives and left. When I arrived the company driver was waiting for me at the airport and took me to the factory. I had been told that I would be doing carpentry but when I got there I found that it was cutting plywood. The factory was located in the middle of the jungle away from the city and 2km from the nearest road. It was a large factory and all the work was machine work. The company I worked for had about ten factories and the one I was in had 10-12 people working. The people I was working with were either from Pakistan or from Misor [in Egypt]. All were Muslim. It was hard for me as many spoke Arabic, although the Pakistanis spoke Urdu. The salary was 11000rs pm which was what I had been told but this was not much for going such a long way. For the first three months I was not allowed out of the factory as this was part of the contract but after that I was able to go roaming on my day off”.

Although critical of the working arrangements, Shamshad held a different view of the religious environment:

“There were many rules there from The Quran and these had to be followed. These laws were good and people were happy because of them. I was provided with accommodation which was good as we were given an AC room in which only 2-3 men slept. My passport was taken from me for a 2 year period for safe keeping as they told me that I was not able to keep it safe myself. I felt it was a good place as people did not lie and they were good Muslims who always went for Namaaz. For the first 3 months it was

not so good as I was cutting plywood but after this they noticed my skill and put me on carpentry work. I came back due to family and wanted to return but got married and had some family problems. I also could not raise the money to go back a second time but still, to this day I hope to return”.

Others were much more critical of their experience. In a shop round the corner from Arshad, I meet Mohammad Irfan. He had gone to Saudi to work in AC servicing. However, the experience had quickly turned sour and he complained:

“...people there are like dogs as they made me do all sorts of other jobs, like cleaning toilets, which are below my skill. They were very rude and treated me like labour only. I stayed only three months and then had got out of there quickly. I will never go back. But due to this I lost a lot of money as I had already paid for the agent”.

Stories of returnees, then, are varied. People tell tales of exploitation and opportunity, sacrifice and glory, confinement and adventure, ambivalence and ambiguity (i.e.: Uehling, 2002; Osella & Osella, 2008). Younger men, in particular, tend toward positive interpretations. Experiences were often couched in ways that built status among peers. In *Purani Mandi*, a group of young guys made ornamental bannister pillars. Though some distance from *Kamil Wali Gully*, I stopped at their shop occasionally for tea and a chat. They were always full of banter and often included me in the teasing. On one occasion I was introduced to Usman Malik. He had recently returned from Kuwait and was full of bluster and boasts as he ensured that his friends and others in neighbouring shops were aware of his worldly experiences. As a *tanga* (horse-drawn taxi) passed, he mocked the driver for the backwardness of his vehicle. His friends laughed and applauded as he revelled in his new image. Later, a nearby craftsman told me that ‘of course it is all lies’ and that he knew that Usman was there ‘only working as a servant to some big *malik*’.

For others, particularly those who have made numerous trips and spent many years away from family, the narrative is much more dominated by sacrifice and hard work.

H.M. Aqeel relates:

“It is not a beneficial system for us, but it is not so harmful either. I spent my life away. I spent 18 years outside and I earned a lot of money but I am

like a stranger in my own country now. My goodwill is finished now. No one can recognise me. My circulation of work is finished too and I am like a new person so I have to start from step one. Yes, I spent my life out of the country but I am happy as my family spent their life in comfort. If I worked in Saharanpur then I could earn 200-300rs per day and some days none. When I was outside so I could send money every week. We spent a happy life and lived comfortably with lots of money. The life insurance is also there due to the money sent from outside. It is true that we can earn here but we cannot even save a rupee as the salary is very low. In the gulf we can earn 20-25000rs in a month. When a man goes to the gulf then everyday their family wants more and more things. Our wife thinks that if we work here, then there is little money so she has little desire but if we work outside then her desire goes up and up. When we are outside then we are always under pressure as the family always calls asking for this thing or that thing”²⁶⁹.

The very networks that took Mr Aqeel away from Saharanpur to Mumbai and onto the Gulf had now become cut. The narrative of sacrifice was one told time and time again by older Gulf migrants and stands in contrast to that often presented by younger men such as Usman. Since Mr Aqeel’s first migration, networks had become more established and it is not uncommon for people to arrange work directly from Saharanpur through friends and relatives, such as the routes being considered by Mustaqim for his son and by Shahid. Whilst this provides an alternative option, there were still those who, such as Shamshad, found their way to the Gulf via internal migrations.

‘A Slow Life/a Fast Life’: Returnees Experiences of being ‘Back Home’

There were often contrasts made by returnees based on the pace of life in each place. Within these narratives Saharanpur was seen as somewhat boring and slow paced compared to the ‘fast life’ of the Gulf. On the other hand those in the Gulf were seen as having little time for each other, with Saharanpur being the location where time was made for friends and, to use Arshad’s words²⁷⁰, for ‘society’. As Azim, a recent returnee describes:

“I went to Dubai and Oman. It was okay but I only made enough money for household things. I got 12000rs/m and sent a little back. It was good [there] but was an expensive place so it was hard to save but I managed 700rs/m.

²⁶⁹ Edited and adapted from interview transcript.

²⁷⁰ See chapter 7.

It was a very fast life there and people just looked after themselves. Here people give time for others but for me it is like a slow place”.

For some it was duty to family which brought them back. For others it was a chance to purchase a plot and construct property or get married. Return could also be an opportunity to move up the ladder and become a *malik* or showroom owner. Around the corner from Arshad’s shop was the showroom of Mohammad Dilshad. Plump and smiling, he came from a family who made the transition in the previous generation. His friend Kalim, however, came from a labour background and saw Gulf earnings as a way to obtain the level of his associate. A little younger than Dilshad he was slim and stylishly attired. While we talked he idly fiddled with a new mobile. Although his outward appearance suggested a degree of success his story of migration was mixed:

“I was in Dubai for two and a half years. Before going I worked in Goa. I am in the polishing line. Now I am 26 but when I went I was 23. The agent was not so expensive compared to some others as I did not pay for the visa only the flight. The agent told lies, though. He charged me 16000rs for the ticket but it cost only 12000rs. I had a visa for three years and they took my passport to keep for the first two. The agent told me that I would get 1500 dinar a month but it was only 1000 dinar. I was in a room with six other people from U.P. The company made a deduction for the room and for the taxi from the airport. We arranged food ourselves and ate in the room together.

Each day we worked ten hours but there was also overtime. We got paid extra for it but it was not our choice. We got one day off. We would spend some time in the room relaxing and chatting. Always we made some good food on Friday and went for Namaaz. After that we went roaming in Dubai. It is a very expensive place and it was hard for me to buy things and to get about. Although it was costly I liked roaming. The best things were going to the beach and eating burgers.

For Ramadan the company gave free food but outside of this our monthly expense was something like 200 diram [not including deductions taken by the company]. After all the costs and things I could save about 1200-1300rs per month. I sent this back with Western Union to my mother. She put all the money in the bank and slowly I got half lakh [50,000rs].

After returning I started business in the showroom line. I made a partnership with a friend and went to Lucknow to make a showroom. In Lucknow the expense was great and it was hard to sell things as we were not in a good location. I had a great loss there. Due to this I am thinking to go back [to the Gulf]. When I worked in Goa I had one friend from Saharanpur. He has been in Dubai for eight years and I will arrange to work with him. This time it will be better as he can fix things. Last time I had many problems because

of the agent. Now I will have a direct contract with the company and they will send the plane ticket. This is due to my friend"²⁷¹.

As with Mustaqim's story²⁷² Kalim also sees migration as potentially enabling a better life through starting his own business. Kalim's comments are also representative of the ways in which workers are using similar networks of friends to those utilised in negotiating work within India itself, which now, aided by new communication technologies, play a part in forging connections to the Gulf. Whilst Kalim's story was mixed, others had experienced greater loss. Eager to help in my quest for information, Dilshad suggested that I should talk to another man who was peddling a goods rickshaw, loaded high with half-finished chairs, on the opposite side of the road. Nasir Ddin was a man of short stature approaching middle age. His greying hair was concealed with a liberal application of henna and his simple shirt and trousers were dusted with sawdust:

"I went to Bahrain in 2004. Before going I was a barber and had a shop. It was not big and was on rent, but I had chairs and scissors. My cousin was working in the Gulf already and doing well. You see pictures of smart Arabs in the paper and think that if you go you will become like them. It was expensive so I sold my barber equipment to pay 35,000rs to an agent. He arranged the work, visa and plane ticket. I arrived [in Bahrain] at 8pm but there was no one from the company to meet me. I had no money but waited all night in the airport with nothing to eat. The next morning a driver finally came.

I worked in a hardware store. I was the only worker and was general labour. I just carried things and put things in customer's cars. At night I slept in the shop. The agent told me that I would get a salary of 10,000rs per month but it was 6500rs. The work in the store was okay but I could not save anything. In Bahrain my monthly expense was about 1500rs so I could send back only 5000rs each month. This was enough for household expenses as I am also married with three children. When I realised this I wanted to come back but the owner had my passport. Anyway I had no money for the plane ticket. After two years I came back but had little savings so could not do anything. The only thing was to buy a second hand rickshaw for 6000rs. I lost all my things here and now I am 36 years old but am only pulling this rickshaw. If any person asks me if they should go to the Gulf I tell them not to"²⁷³.

²⁷¹ Edited and adapted from interview transcript.

²⁷² See previous chapter.

²⁷³ Edited and adapted from interview transcript.

Later Dilshad described how Nasir's story contrasted from that of the cousin who encouraged him to go:

"When he [Nasir] came back he was crying a lot but you know his cousin stayed there for eight years and made very big money. Now his cousin is back and has a big house. Now people say that he is like his cousin's dog"

Nasir's Gulf experience was common, but so were more successful experiences. This 'success' was often displayed through the buying of plots and building property. Mehboob Ansari, a resident of nearby *Chilkana*, was particularly critical of this:

"For people who work there, there is benefit due to the exchange rate, but those who go are just spending money. It cannot be put back into business here as they have to take a loan to go and have to pay this back first. Then they think about building the house and arranging family marriages before business. When people come back from overseas, if they manage to start their own business, some shop or something, then they stay but if they cannot then they look to go back as they earn less money here. The people who go eat well and come back very healthy as the food there is cheap. But the problem is that they lose the value for their relations [in Saharanpur]"²⁷⁴.

Again, the benefits of Gulf migration were couched in terms of the loss of valuable local relationships. Family needs and desires also took precedence. Marriage expenses for sisters and other relatives as well as construction of family property, were prominent. Whilst having a source of Gulf remittance can aid in arranging marriages for relations of migrants, returnees themselves could find this challenging. It is tempting to assume that a returnee would be a particularly eligible bachelor due to improved economic standing. However, many expressed concern about arranging marriages of daughters and sisters with such men as they feared that they may go back leaving their new wife 'abandoned'. Those contemplating migration to the Gulf, then, had a variety of factors to consider and the stories described here reflect the difficulties as well as the potential benefits. Compared to internal migration, then, work in the Gulf represents a far greater gamble yet holds the potential of larger rewards. However, as with internal migration, a black and white image of rational risk versus reward analysis falls short of fully unpacking individual and collective motivations and desires. It is prudent, then, to turn to the labour camps themselves in order to better understand subjective experiences.

²⁷⁴ Edited and adapted from interview transcript.

Following Arrival: The Dormitories

I had never met Gulfam, prior to arriving in *Mussafah*, having only been introduced to him by phone through a mutual friend in Saharanpur. At that time he was in *Sharjah* working for a company fitting interiors in new buildings. Just before my arrival he was transferred to *Abu Dhabi* for a short contract. Gulfam was much older than I expected. Imagining a younger man during our telephone conversations, he turned out to be around 40 with greying hair and a full frame. We made our way, along with the company driver, to the dormitory block. Situated between a couple of small shops and a construction storage yard the block consisted of a steel gate which opened onto a courtyard with doors to the rooms on three sides. Gulfam's room was the first on the right. I tried to lay my bedding on the floor but Gulfam insisted that I take his bunk. The room was shared with five others. Gulfam, however, told me that in some other rooms there were two men sharing a bed. In spite of this, conditions were better than those I experienced while migrating with workers in India. Each room had a rickety AC unit and the bunks had mattresses. There was a kitchen containing numerous stoves which became crowded, hot and full of the smell of a variety of South Asian cooking during meal times, as the burners were fired up. The men made their own food, the duty of which was often shared on a per room basis. Rooms naturally divided into national groupings brought together by common language and shared taste preferences. Yet in many ways it was a hyper-cosmopolitan space. Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Indians joined each other in the courtyard to play football, chat and share jokes. Gulfam assured me that, for the most part, everyone got on well. Waving his arm across the courtyard he said 'you can talk to all the people here'. Then, however, he hesitated. Indicating two men sheltering from the sun on the opposite side he said 'actually those men are not good for you to talk to, they are Taliban'. Behind the dorm rooms there was a substantial toilet and shower block which was a world apart from the small facility in Hyderabad or Kamareddy. The dormitory block was not provided by the Jordanian owned company for whom all the residents worked, but was leased from a company specialising in dormitory accommodation.

My initial impression was that many facilities were provided for workers but when, a couple of days later, we began to pack up to return to Sharjah it became clear that this

was not so. With the exception of the bunks, AC units and toilets, everything was loaded onto a lorry. This included mattresses, cookers, gas cylinders, a couple of fridges and even carpet tiles from the floor. Gulfam explained that all these items had been bought by workers themselves. Some, such as cookers and cylinders, were purchased collectively within rooms, whilst others, such as mattresses, had been bought by the workers to provide a little comfort.

Gulfam had found work through an agent in Delhi. Although there were some costs involved this was to cover the airfare and visa. The agent did not make additional charges. One of the other men, Suheel, had paid a much larger amount of 90,000rs whilst going through an agent. Most of the men in the room were from Saharanpur; Junaid, however, was from a village near Lucknow. Junaid was the most experienced of the group having spent more than 15 years working in the Gulf, returning home only to obtain new contracts. For him life had become that of the continuous migrant and he told me that he preferred life here to his home. The others joked that this was because his wife was *"buhuut mota"* (very fat) jesting that *"Junaid Bhai pasia nehee mil suktai hai kyoki uskee beebi sub khatee hai"* (brother Junaid cannot make any money as his wife eats it all). Just as Musharraf, the perpetual migrant I had met in Hyderabad, had grown to prefer life on the road to a settled existence in Saharanpur, so Junaid had found life amongst these men in the crowded dormitory blocks more recognisable than comforts of home. Of course the pressure of supporting the growing expectations of the family also played a part and so he stayed away. I was reminded of another man I had met in Kolkata. About to head out on yet another contract, he was desperately trying to delay his departure to spend a little more time with his wife and children. Later it emerged that his wife wanted him to leave. Everyone knew the reason as for some years she had been having an affair with a neighbour.

Gulfam, however, felt very differently about his situation and was keen to return. He missed his wife and children. He described how the agent had made promises regarding his salary that had not proved true. Gulfam was a foreman and had fifteen guys in his charge, but for him this was still a step down. In Saharanpur he had owned a furniture business. Whilst this was not particularly large, he described how he used to be his own

master. Financial problems, however, led to a decline and eventually he was forced to shut down. It was this that drove him into looking for work in the Gulf as a way of acquiring sufficient capital to restart. Here, though, he felt underpaid and unhappy with the interior fitting work. I was also introduced to Wajid who hailed from a village on the outskirts of Saharanpur. As with Junaid he was a long-term migrant and worked in the foreman role. He described how he was a kind of informal *thēkēdār* arranging work for others from his village, most of whom laboured under him on the same contracts. Whilst various avenues exist, the informal connections that had driven early migration to the Gulf continued to feed into patterns of migration in this small labour camp. Likewise, processes familiar to those who migrated internally, built on affiliations created in the neighbourhoods of Saharanpur, also played out beyond India's borders.

Conclusion

Routes to the Gulf take a variety of forms. They may involve linkages that bring internal migrants into contact with spaces and people who provide a link to further networks of informal recruitment. They may involve agents or brokers. Increasingly, as Gulf migration becomes more common, they involve friends or relatives who work, or have previously worked in Saudi, Qatar or Dubai. The ways potential migrants imagine or judge certain potential destinations vary as do the views of non-migrants regarding returnees. For those finding new religiosity in Saudi or elsewhere this may be seen as a strengthening of their moral fabric or be met with derision, mockery or resentment. Likewise, those who return from locations seen as being filled with vice may be viewed with suspicion regarding their ethical and religious standards or with excitement regarding the same. Not all of what is told after return, however, is necessarily reflective of actual experience. These experiences neither represent a complete commitment to the Gulf nor a detachment from home. Rather, the stories of Gulfam and others are filled with "ambiguous attachments, dual loyalties and alternatives concepts of home" (Uethling, 2002; p.388). Likewise, as researchers, there is only so much that can be gained by locating ourselves in one place or the other. The labour camps have their own dynamic and as with the tightly knit groups that form whilst migrating in India, they can be realms in which bonds between workers are further reinforced. The types of informal

networks that pervaded internal migration had not just extended to the Gulf but had also been a critical part of the early foundation of Gulf migration from U.P. In this sense, then, utilising informal pathways as a preference to the risks involved in going through formal agents or brokers was not merely an alternative but a fundamental part of the scene. However, unlike internal migration, the fixed nature of contracts and the problems associated with attempting to make an early return, means that workers must sacrifice the flexibility and mobility that enables them to negotiate their conditions in India in pursuit of greater earning potential abroad.

The expectations of family and the requirement to support spouses, households and children formed an area of concern for all the men. These concerns were all too real and stories of wives having affairs or sons going off the rails were often discussed. Other concerns, too, hovered in the background of thoughts. Some of those in the dormitories told me of horror stories they had heard of companies going bust and workers ending up trapped and out of pocket. After the workers packed up the labour camp for their relocation to Sharjah I attempted again to make contact with Gulfam. He gave me his new location as being close to the Allied Paints factory in Sharjah's industrial area, situated some distance from the palatial sea front. This time, however, my attempts to establish contact prove futile. Still I lingered outside the gates of the paint factory for several hours, a large open space between the gate and a road junction which was a popular hangout spot for workers. Heaving with numerous groups, it was not long before I was approached by some young Bangladeshi men.

They were quick to ask if I was able to arrange any work and explained that the company they had been employed by had folded. I asked how they were surviving and they explained that they were having to do odd jobs that were not official and slept mostly in the open. The intersection, in many ways, represented a space more familiar in South Asia than in the supposed glamour of the Gulf. As well as groups of off-duty workers there were several hawkers present. It was not long, however, before a police motorcycle appeared. A torch seller, a man likely to have met the same fate as my new Bangladeshi friends, was quickly targeted and, having been too slow to spot the danger, found himself losing his stock and receiving a fierce clout around the head for his

trouble. It proved an apt reminder that even here, in the relatively formal environs of labour contracts and construction sites, life and work existed in an atmosphere of pervasive precariousness.



The main yard of the labour camp and Gulfam (bottom left) with others in the dormitory

Chapter Ten

Conclusion: From Saharanpur & Back Again



‘Peeking through constraints’

In April of 2013 I returned to Saharanpur fulfilling the promise I made to come back within a year. My first port of call was Mustaqim’s house. Parking my motorbike near the entrance of the narrow lane that provided access, I ran to the door filled with anticipation at seeing the family again. My knock on the gate triggered a cacophony of excited children’s voices and I was soon engaged in a series of warm embraces with Mustaqim and the kids. For Mustaqim little had changed. The family still lived in two small rented rooms and dreamed of buying a plot. Mustaqim and his eldest son, Javid, continued to make trips outside the city for work, to varying degrees of success. Mustaqim explained that *mandīs* (recessions/fallow periods) had come and gone over the year, just as they had the year before. Still they pondered the merits and risks of sending Javid for work in Saudi. In spite of the myriad of connections available to them, connections which now criss-crossed India and extended beyond oceans, the family remained constrained by the fluctuating continuity of their economic position. It was an apt reminder that in all the excitement of following a variety of networks and flows a surprising amount had, in fact, remained the same.

Concluding Arguments: Back inside Informality & Niches

This thesis has utilised informality, not just to understand work and conditions of employment, but also networks, connections, niches and spaces of production and exchange. The thesis has explored the ways in which an economic space, which has long existed in conditions of labour informality, was (and continues to be) produced through complex and historically embedded connections. In Saharanpur this has interlocked with circulations based upon shifting global processes and the Muslim identity of the labour force. Whilst there are very specific constraints emanating from this identity, the connections present within these circulations offer certain possibilities for ‘carving out niches’ and connecting with other people and places. They permit access to knowledge and allow shared identities to be constructed around particular ways of ‘doing’ and of ‘being’. These identities, however, are not necessarily political in nature (Featherstone, 2008).

For many of the individuals discussed in the course of this thesis, labouring in Saharanpur’s informal wood industry meant that work and production were deeply intermeshed with other areas of life. However, this was not a unidirectional process where pre-existing or primordial networks and cultural tropes were the static formations into which supply chain capitalism became embedded. A focus on informality has instead revealed a much more fluid and shifting scene in which a variety of individuals and institutions play a part in shaping the economic terrain. Craft workers’ long experience of labouring in informal conditions has allowed them to become particularly adept at negotiating and creating connections that are as much a part of shaping the niches within which they labour as are various global processes. Here there were distinctions based on ambiguous forms of stratification and the highly gendered nature of the workforce. Culturally defined, imposed and self-imposed restrictions on mobility and forms of economic engagement, for example, created clear patterns of distinction between men and women. However, this cannot be simplistically conceived in terms of “...culturalist stereotypes and rational choice reconstructions of values and motives” (Meagher, 2007; p.407). Although diverging somewhat from Meagher’s institutional analysis, here again the scene can be effectively conceived in terms of niches and connections. Niches can be ‘carved out’ within the bounds of structural and

cultural constraints. Grains can be followed and connections created. These in turn hold their own forms of support and mutuality, or competition and exploitation (Tsing, 2000/2009). The engagement between global supply chains and locally constituted niches are active, not just in altering local economies, but in shaping capitalism itself.

Whilst this thesis has covered a variety of connections and geographical locations, it has always remained focused on one labouring community. The connections followed have formed a variety of trajectories, broadly covering 'time', 'space' and 'place'. In chapter two I have explored the history of the community and industry. The chapter has unravelled the ways in which it has been shaped by the colonial experience, the tremendous upheavals of partition, political changes and economic liberalisation. I have argued that this shows a Muslim craft community that is much more fluid, outward looking and interconnected than some accounts suggest. Chapter three has comprised an exploration of the complex threads of the supply chain, from state-run connective nodes for linking with global companies, to neighbourhood networks among homeworkers. It has revealed the liminality and ambiguity of various actors and the problematic nature of class within informal realms of labour and work. It has also unpacked ways in which complex systems of credit and late payment act to bond chains of supply. This is not a technology of control created by the formal planning of corporations or states, rather it has emerged in the context of informality and within religiously framed notions of morality and debt. In chapter four I have dealt further with the gendered nature of production. Whilst acknowledging the highly marginalised nature of women in the industry I have also emphasised the ways in which female workers are active in negotiating and shaping space and conditions of labour.

Chapter five has highlighted how labour force reproduction, through the *ustad-shagrid* system, is changing in line with demands of global markets, local reconfigurations and shifting views of workers themselves leading to an informalisation of relations between masters and apprentices. It has also dealt with the ways in which instrumental and emotive aspects overlap in the shaping of craft workers and in relations between *ustads* and their shagrids. In chapter six I have dealt with an individual's very personal story of involvement in the Tabligh Jamaat. Whilst acknowledging that there are many

complexities in the way that reformism and Islamic practice is performed in Saharanpur, I have emphasised the ways in which participation in *khuraj* (religious tour) attempts, on a temporary basis at least, to separate individuals from influences of economy, community and family. However, individuals such as Arshad soon return to the economic space bringing re-inscribed facets of identity and status into the labour environment. The chapter has argued that it is evident that aspects of religious practice are active in creating informal regulatory frameworks with a specific moral and ethical base, although not in the absence of liberalising market forces. Chapter seven has given attention to the role friendship plays in an informal economy where street, bazaar, home and work overlap in various ways. The chapter has unpacked the duality of an 'economy of affection' which, whilst not bound up in pre-modern structures, forms an important constituent both in the ways that workers negotiate their position and as a means through which they are incorporated into chains of supply.

In the final part of the thesis I have described how connections, built on older Muslim and other networks, enabled workers to retain a high degree of mobility. Just as capital seeks to usurp labour by becoming increasingly mobile, so workers have learnt how to utilise and exercise their own mobility to navigate and negotiate conditions of labour. Here, too, there has been an affective quality to these movements as craft workers are driven by dreams, desires and aspirations as well as economic need. We have seen, however, that this is also determined by the regulatory fabric of the destination space. Chapter eight has shown that, while in India, Saharanpur's craft workers were able to exercise a high level of mobility in these negotiations. However, chapter nine illustrated that once in the labour camps of the Gulf, with its more formal regulatory environment, this mobility was lost. Indeed, it is the very mobility offered by informality that regulation of labour in the Gulf seeks to stymie. Gulfam, H.M.Aqeel, Mustaqim and others utilised forms of obtaining work and networks of recruitment familiar from migration networks in India to attempt to minimise the risks involved. Although the regulatory environment of the labour camps acted to control mobility, there were other aspects of informality that it did little to alter. In particular, the precariousness of labour's position with regards to secure work and contracts. In a scene where "flexibility is often achieved by capital through casualization and by labour through its physical

movement” (Harriss-White, 2003; p.24), it was the combining of formality and informality which encouraged the former and stymied the latter. It is a potent reminder that the state (Roy, 2009; Cross, 2000) along with emerging forms of transnational governance (Gupta & Fergusson 2002) acts within and upon informality and niches in the interests of capital.

Central to this thesis has been the argument that a long experience of operating under conditions of informality has given workers in Saharanpur certain advantages over those for whom such conditions are new. I have suggested that informal economic spaces, such as Saharanpur’s wood industry, are not peripheral, secondary or dualist but are central to contemporary capitalism. Concurring with Tsing (2009), I have argued that supply chain capitalism operates through an engagement with diverse niches. In this context an emphasis on embeddedness has been helpful. However, the unidirectional nature of embeddedness did not provide sufficient scope for exploring the complexity and interconnected nature of these spaces. How, then, do we best conceptualise these localities? How do we account for the ‘bigness’ of global capitalism as well as the tremendous diversity of cultural practice, religious belief, moralities and subjectivities (Tsing, 2009)? How do we understand which of these facets are enabling and which are constraining? Whilst not providing all the answers, I hope this thesis has made a contribution. By situating this ethnography of workers in Saharanpur’s wood industry within the context of informality (and, as a consequence, formality) the thesis has attempted to operate across scales by engaging with both the ‘bigness’ of global capitalism and the specificity of the local and the lives therein.

Economic informality has allowed us to explore global reconfigurations and to think about how these play out in an industry that has always been largely informal. An engagement with more spatially orientated ways of thinking about informality has allowed us to become aware of both constraints, such as communal bounding or gendered spatialisation, and supportive connections, such as those forged in the intense spatial context of neighbourhoods, homes and workshops. Finally, an engagement with informality as a way of thinking through formal and informal interpersonal relations, and hence how emotive and affective forces underpin economic activity, has allowed a

consideration of individual motivations, subjective experiences and passions that drive wood workers in the city to engage in religious reform, build friendships and migrate to other places in search of more than economic gain. Informal niches and the connections they involve are not free from affective motivations and entanglements, rather they operate through and in conjunction with these emotive factors. However, the various layers at which informality has been engaged with (economic, spatial & interpersonal), leave it somewhat amorphous as an anthropological category. In the following sections I look to push the theoretical framework of this thesis a little further. Here it is with the amorphous nature of informality that I begin.

Rooting Informality: Circulation & Circuits in the Informalisation of Labour

For workers in Saharanpur informality is not a new economic order emanating from the loss of regular contracts and the outsourcing of labour. Formality, as a means of labour organisation, has never been the dominant structure. There are, of course, degrees within this. Large factories may utilise many of the symbols of formality: Defined walls and gates, rules and regulations for workers, prominent symbols of trade association membership and in some cases even a degree of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Yet even here, with many working through *thēkēdārs* or on a piece rate or weekly basis, the vast majority of the workforce cannot be seen as ‘formal sector’. Much of the narrative of informality has focused on its growth following economic liberalisation. Yet, as with Saharanpur, for the vast majority of India’s labour force it has always been the primary, if not the only option. Should we, therefore, seek to dispose of notions of economic or labour informality or of the idea of an informal economy? After all, if it has always formed the primary constitution of the labour force in much of the world, has been utilised across degrees of social status (Roy, 2011), and can even be seen as underpinning economic activity everywhere (Granovetter, 1985), does it become defunct?

I argue not. Although, as with any category, it has its limits in helping us understand formations, processes and transformations, it has not been my intention to set this thesis out as a ‘straw horse-based’ argument. Whilst not the case for Saharanpur’s craft

workers, globally the informalisation of labour is very much a reality. Across localities much of the labour force is seeing a slide towards increasingly precarious and informalised forms of working (Gooptu, 2013a; Mole, 2010; Shever, 2008). Instead of suggesting that the formal/informal dichotomy should be dismissed as a way of thinking about labour and work, this thesis illustrates the ways in which differing renditions of the informal and formal interrelate. An informal economy interlocks with spatial considerations and both overlap with affective concerns based in emotions and passions. However, I also suggest that we have looked for the origins of labour force informalisation (as a facet of broader economic restructuring across the globe) in the wrong place.

At the start of this thesis I argued that not only does capitalism operate through niches but that niches are also active in shaping capitalism. A large portion of literature dealing with labour informality begins with a specific teleology (i.e. Mole, 2010; Mezzadri, 2008; Mollona, 2005). The narrative is that informalisation of labour has been the result of neoliberal/liberalising policy beginning in the US and Europe (Harvey, 2005). From this base, informalisation, as a facet of neoliberalism, was exported worldwide (including to India), through the implementation of structural adjustments programs orchestrated by the IMF and World Bank (Ibid). I do not contest this, however it remains a somewhat Eurocentric perspective. I see the teleology as being somewhat lengthier. I suggest that we begin to give attention to the ways in which industrial capitalism learnt lessons²⁷⁵ in informal labour control through its engagement with industries and spaces such as Saharanpur. Even within spaces that were formalised during the colonial period, such as Calcutta's jute mills, many of the features that composed the informal sector remained present:

"In order to maintain the flexibility of the workforce, the mills imprinted on the labour market an unstable and casual character, aided by an informal and personalised system of recruitment [...] The informal system of recruitment brought into full play social identities based on gender, caste, religion, language and region. The way these relationships mediated access to jobs, credit and housing hardened identities and deepened differences within the workers. While these differences served at times to divide the

²⁷⁵ This is not to ascribe a consciousness to capitalism.

workforce along various axes, they also allowed solidarities to be forged from these relationships”²⁷⁶.

(Sen, 1999; p.53)

This continues in what is left of the jute industry today, with workers and others drawing resources and support from the non-class identities of caste, gender, religion or ethnicity (Fernandez, 1997). A similar pattern has played out in other parts of the world and continued into the post-colonial period despite attempts to formalise labour forces (Sepulveda & Syrett, 2007). However, capital has become increasingly skilled at managing such relations to its advantage. Although increasing in the post-liberalisation era (Chaudhuri & Banerjee, 2007), informality has always been the dominant form of labour organisation in India. We should, then, seek to ask, not just how shifts in economic practice in ‘the west’ have affected India, but how capitalism’s experience of managing informality in the supposed ‘periphery’, has been recirculated and reconstituted in ‘the west’? I propose that, rather than a teleology of pre-modern ‘informal’ economies versus modern ‘formal’ economies, capitalism’s experience of managing the networks and niches of the informal economy in India and elsewhere is itself the root of broader labour force informalisation. Indeed, many of the facets of an informal economy, discussed in this thesis, now play an increasing part in economic spaces elsewhere in the world. In Sheffield’s post-industrial steel sector, for example:

“...capitalist subcontracting, state welfare, and economic policies of local regeneration have increased the informalization and casualization of steel labour and blurred the social spaces of the factory, the family, and the neighbourhood. The increased permeability between formal and informal economic processes and the re-embeddedness of production in the social and political texture of the neighbourhood tangles idioms of kinship and capitalist ideologies of production and turns the structural conflict between ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ into a generational and gender conflict within the working class”.

(Mollona, 2005, p.527)

²⁷⁶ Sen refers to jute mills in Bengal between 1890 and 1940.

This then is capitalism through circulation rather than emanation. Yet just as in the Indian context, Mollona also emphasises the ways in which informality brings together collectives of individuals who share, albeit limited, resources in order to improve their position. This brings us back to thinking about the degrees to which informality can be a resource or tool for subaltern groups of workers and others (Bayat, 2000; Singerman, 1995). To what extent can niches be 'carved out' when, for example, diversity also implies inequality?

Informality & Duality: Accounting for Power

Duality, or a double edged quality, is a feature of so many of the concepts discussed in this thesis: 'Informality', 'cosmopolitanism', 'affect'. All offer possibilities and potentialities. All show glimmers of being the means through which people can improve their situation, access resources, negotiate their position, or even engage in direct or abstract forms of resistance. This duality lies in the fact that all of these paradigms simultaneously offer potential for further exploitation, for deeper and more embedded forms of extraction, for the creation of autonomous producers who, whilst not necessarily happy with their lot, at least accept it. At the outset of this thesis I briefly critiqued De Soto (1989) for overstating the empowering capacity of informality²⁷⁷. To be fair to De Soto it should be acknowledged that he recognises certain limitations in the transformative capacity of informality. As De Soto (1989) puts it: "Informality is not the best of all possible worlds [but the result of...] informal's desperate and enterprising attempts to build an alternative system to the one that has denied them its protection" (p.152). Aside from De Soto's focus on 'freeing the market', his treatment of what lies within the informal sector is far too uniform. This is reflected in his prescriptions. De Soto (2003), for example, argues for the registration of property ownership throughout informal settlements as a quick cure for informality's ills. Yet, practical issues aside, he ignores issues of landlordism and repossession that are so common of formal housing markets. Likewise, when we apply this to Saharanpur with its various ambiguous actors,

²⁷⁷ See p.11.

it becomes clear that regulation aimed at unleashing an 'entrepreneurial spirit' would most likely provide greatest benefit to those who are already big players in the industry.

De Soto, then, fails to deal with power and diversity within informality itself. The notion of diversity has been engaged with across this thesis beginning with the Tsing's (2009/2012) theoretical work on supply chains. Power, as a constituent of the niches, networks, connections, and spaces of production and exchange has played a background role. I have left the examination of relations of power amongst groups and individuals to rest within descriptive accounts of the stories of craft workers and others. Power, however, is as much a part of life in Saharanpur's gullies as it is in shaping Saharanpur as a place and in its relations with other places. At times it has been blunt. The threats and intimidation utilised by 'big men' (such as Hajji), the communal structuring of space which impacted on migration (as expressed by Ishmael's concern that for those who carried outward symbols of their Islamic faith certain journeys and routes were unsafe)²⁷⁸, or the unequal relations between spaces of migrant origin and destination (such as those between Uttar Pradesh and The Gulf) were examples of this. There have also been various forms of 'soft power'. The persuasive smile of Arshad's religious *ustad* or Shahid's utilisation of friendship as a means of keeping workers in his workshop. In thinking about the ways in which niches are shaped it is appropriate to also pay attention to power. Of course power comes in many forms and from various sources. As Massey (2009) argues:

[...this could include] the power of violence, or of authority, or of seduction [...], of domination, of creativity [...] the different instances of social formations (the economic, the political, the cultural, for example) may be analysed as having their own power geometries, even though undoubtedly they will be related to each other, inflect each other, and quite probably reinforce each other".

(p.18)

Such considerations urge us to ask about the extent to which different actors, within niches such as Saharanpur's wood industry, may be able to utilise potentially beneficial

²⁷⁸ See p.190

aspects of informality. There are echoes here of Foucauldian notions of power as diffused, as circulatory, as forming chain or netlike structures where “...individuals are the vehicles of power, not [only] its points of application” (Foucault, 1980; p.98). Foucault’s emphasis falls primarily on the diffusion of power as symptomatic of control within a ‘democratic’ state (as opposed to more concentrated forms of rule) and of an associated shift from a “mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies” (ibid, p.109). This is a facet that has been utilised by others in conceptualising corporate power and control of the factory floor (i.e. Rudnyckyj, 2004; Ong, 2010).

This thesis, however, has given greater emphasis to the market, non-state and non-corporate actors in shaping supply chains that work through diversity and niches of production and exchange (Tsing, 2009/2012). Here, power plays out somewhat differently. The power of the market, for example, lies in its capacity to utilise diverse, culturally construed niches and to incorporate them into chains of supply. It lies in the ability to utilise a niche structure to allow the ambiguous actors involved to embody a sense of performing in their own self-interest. The power of actors within niches lies in their ability to influence and shape each niche (whether it be defined by gender, caste, class or, more likely, an ensemble of factors). Here, however, we must be careful. Whilst connections of kin, friends and neighbours provided the means to access work, support and even informal ‘welfare’, they were also imbued with obligations and structures that serviced the interests of the supply chain. Wood (2003) points out that connections and networks which may appear empowering can also act as constraints. Family and social pressures can make it difficult to exit such networks and the relations of power that persist within them. White (2004) suggests that it is not so much mutual support that creates personal relations between informal workers, but money. White continues by arguing that being able to take advantage of “locally defined social benefits [...] does not negate the equally salient fact that [...] cultural practices make it possible for global business to earn greater profits by paying producers less than their labour is worth” (p.3).

Power, then, is exercised by informal actors in a variety of unequal ways. The ‘carving of niches’ does not necessarily go against the interests of supply chains or global markets. Larger manufacturers, exporters or successful *thēkēdārs* have far greater ability to shape economic space than do small-scale craft workers, homeworkers or those working on piece rate²⁷⁹. However, a worthy critique made of Foucault’s understanding of power and resistance is that it ends up floating “around aimlessly in an unknown, uncertain and ambivalent universe of power relations, with an end result of an unsettled and tense accommodation with the existing power arrangements” (Bayat, 2000; p.544). Within the context of niches, power is also diffuse but rests fundamentally within the chains of supply into which workers and others are incorporated through the ambiguous nature of the connections involved.

“[The actions of workers and others] ...are encouraged by new figures of labor and labor power in which making a living appears as management, consumption, or entrepreneurship. These figurations blur the lines between self-exploitation and superexploitation, not just for owner-operators but also for the workers recruited into supplier enterprises. Through such forms of exploitation, supply chain capitalism creates both great wealth and great poverty”.

(Tsing, 2009; p.171)

Here it should be noted that, aside from communal tensions, the only forms of protest mentioned in Saharanpur were against state regulation of the wood industry. Unlike Bayat’s (2000) ‘quiet encroachment’, where resistance occurs with spontaneous collectivity when the space slowly gained from the state is seized back, in Saharanpur it was very much orchestrated by ‘big players’ who already held substantial power within the *mohallas*, workshops and factories²⁸⁰. Indeed, Bayat’s focus on informality as embodied primarily in the relationship between poor neighbourhoods and the state is his primary weakness.

Recent years have seen a great deal of attention paid to the state. Instead, I argue that greater account must be taken of the interrelation between informality and the market as well as the role various institutional actors play. Within the networks and niches

²⁷⁹ Mollona (2005) makes a similar point regarding increased informality in post-industrial Sheffield where large steel contractors and petty capitalists gain the most from informalisation.

²⁸⁰ See p.61.

discussed in this thesis power is something more diffuse and is often ambiguous and shifting in terms of where and when it is focused. Power in this sense is ambivalent. It can simultaneously be constraining, controlling, exploitative or enabling. It is this very elusiveness, the lack of centralisation of power in niche structures, through which supply chain capitalism operates. Informality, then, is fundamentally about diffusing power, or allowing it be diffused, but to do so in ways that primarily empower capital. However, this conception of power is not to say that we should entirely exclude the state from our considerations. Although transnational forms of governance have gained increased importance (Gupta & Ferguson, 2002), along with neighbourhoods and non-economic relations, states continue to play an important part in shaping informal economies and the politics of working class communities (Gooptu, 2001).

A Missing Actor: The State & Informality

Although informal spaces and economies are often discussed as existing outside state regulation, informality itself is bound up with the state. Even though the negotiation and occupation of the urban environment is an “informalized process, often in violation of master plans and state norms [it is also] informally sanctioned by the state” (Roy, 2009; p.825). The changing role of the state in various urban settings has a profound effect on the perpetuation of informality. As Harvey (1989) argues, in Europe and the US, the state has moved away from a managerial and regulatory role and instead become an agent of the market by focusing on ‘urban entrepreneurialism’. In the wood-working *mohallas* of Saharanpur, however, it is not just the landscape of post-liberalisation that contributes to the state’s levels and forms of intervention. Whilst the Indian state often vocalises the logic of individual responsibility and entrepreneurial capitalism and enterprise (Gooptu, 2013a), these articulations are riven by contradiction. As Cross (2000) points out in relation to Latin America, the state’s tolerance or promotion of informality is often geared toward the interests of global capital rather than the supposed entrepreneurial spirit of informality (i.e. De Soto, 1989/1992). When informality constitutes an obstacle to these interests the state takes a different role:

“Since supermarkets could not put street vendors out of business through market mechanisms, they had to use the police system to do it. The solution, therefore, was to ban or over-regulate street vendors while at the same time redesigning urban spaces in which they could no longer exist”.

(Cross, 2000; p.42)

In the Muslim neighbourhoods of Saharanpur, however, the level of state involvement is noticeably low, a feature that has persisted since independence. This is particularly evident in the limited degree of infrastructure and welfare and is a factor commonplace in Muslim areas of cities across North India (Gayer & Jeffrelot, 2013)²⁸¹. A factor that is reinforced by images perpetuated by state’s view that Muslims have little interest in participating in state-based economic or political processes (Simpson, 2005). This is not, however, an absence of state. The fact that the state maintains a low degree of involvement is not so much an absence of state policy but is in itself a decision of the state. In Saharanpur factory owners and wholesalers are engaged in various negotiations with the state’s regulatory frameworks. However, little mention of the state in the stories of those featured throughout this thesis is symbolic of their social and economic position. In the context of previous discussion on mutuality it is worth reflecting on Ananya Roy’s (2014) words in a recent lecture: “The rich have state help, the poor have self-help”. For workers across the industry it was often the necessity for ‘self-help’ which contributed to the creation of informally construed connections and niches. Just as competition, betrayal and friction were all part of life, so was cooperation and mutual support. As we have seen, however, a variety of cultural and religious factors interlocked with state and market to further shape informal networks, niches and spaces of production and exchange.

Islam, Economic Regulation & Identity Revisited

At the start of this thesis I briefly critiqued Kuran’s (2004; 1995) notion of an Islamic sub-economy. This thesis has shown the various ways in which the Muslim identity of craft workers interplay with the creation of networks of migration, niches of work, social

²⁸¹ I return to this shortly in the context of considering the effects of ghettoization on Indian Muslims.

status and the shaping of space. However, this does not occur in isolation. For Kuran it is the Muslim identity of labour forces and others which takes a central role in the shaping of economic spaces and networks of labour, recruitment and migration. There is, then, a strong sense of an instrumentalist value in expressing one's Islamic identity in order to access such networks. This is problematic on two accounts. Firstly, it foregrounds religious identity against all other forms. Secondly, in emphasising the instrumental qualities of an Islamic identity it gives little focus to what religion can mean to individuals on an emotional and affective level. It is with the former of these critiques that I begin. Just as space is shaped by a variety of factors (Donner & De Neve, 2006), so identities are negotiated in fluid ways. Eikelman & Piscatori (1990), for example, critique notions that identity is formed either around primordial (identity as imbued in symbolic and cultural values) or instrumental (identity as a means to maximise collective or individual interests) values. Instead they argue that:

“There is no reason to assume that multiple identities [...] exist in a hierarchical order, for instance, Turkish women sometimes identify first with their families and then with other Muslims [but] at other times, however, - as during visits to saints shrines - they identify primarily with other women”.

(p.17)

For those in Saharanpur identities based on religion were expressed to varying degrees by different individuals. Likewise individuals themselves foregrounded different aspects in altered places and settings. Islam played a part in the shaping of the economy and in contributing to the creation of niches, moralities, ethics and structures. However, it was one of many factors and was impacted by the ‘tensions and contradictions of structural transformations’ (Ismail, 2013). Just as I have focused on description and practice to understand informal work in Saharanpur (Meagher, 2007), so I have found it useful to “look at specific kinds of practice and action, such as travel, which constitute religious traditions and inform the religious imagination” (Eikelman & Piscatori, 1990; p.21).

A more affective consideration of Islam in the lives of craft workers in Saharanpur also warrants attention. I have acknowledged the complex milieu that constitutes differing approaches to Islam in Saharanpur. However, I have tended to focus on the *Tabligh Jamaat*. Partly, this is due to the complexity of Islam and reformism in the city which

would require greater attention than can be given in a thesis already covering many other areas. It is also due to the *Tabligh Jamaat* being a movement with which I became particularly involved as a result of Arshad's participation in its activities. Metcalf's (2003) detailed engagement with the stories of those who had returned from *khuraj* reminds us of the deeply heartfelt meaning that such individuals took from their participation. It is sometimes too easy to look for "external psychological and social conditions of converts [to look for] for clues, patterns, and causes" (Harding, 2001; p.35) in peoples decisions to 'convert' or take on more fundamental forms of belief. Instead, Harding suggests, we should take notice of the ways in which such experiences "become real, known, experienced, and absolutely irrefutable" (p.36).

Too often we tend to negate emotive considerations in favour of structural or instrumental concerns. Networks of friendship, neighbourhood and kin remain prominent, suggesting that we must not automatically assume that the expression of a strong Islamic identity ties in with concerns about accessing an 'Islamic sub-economy'. However, the willingness to leave family and employment, even when in a highly precarious situation of labour, shows a deep level of personal and emotional commitment. For Marshall (2009), in her work on Pentecostals in Nigeria, such passionate commitment embodies the very same dualities discussed in previous sections. On the one hand it is a means of creating passive subjects through charismatic preaching. At the same time, however, there is an 'irreducible element' that goes beyond rationality but is instead bound up in "the experience itself, rendering inoperative the distinctions between consciousness, reason, affect, and the body" (p.162). In his detailed and evocative ethnography of the *Tabligh Jamaat* in Southeast Asia, Noor (2012) finds a similar duality. Whilst recognising that its image of relaxed informality acts to conceal a distinctly hierarchical structure, in the context of late capitalism, Noor argues that such movements should remind us that there:

"...remain other forms of globalisation at work that may intend to take humanity to a different destination altogether. Though it cannot be said that the utopian goal of the *Tabligh Jamaat* is any less structured and regulated than the capitalist paradise of late industrial capitalism may be, it does serve to remind us that other worlds are imaginable at least".

(p.196)

'Affect': So What?

This brings us back to the segment with which the introduction to this thesis closed and asks us to consider once again how affects, passions and emotions shape economic action both within an informal economy and more generally? However, there is a danger here that utilising notions of affect leads us to a level of abstraction where the ethnography and, in particular, the actual words and stories of individuals become lost as they are subscribed little value other than being the result of 'affects effects'. When a homeworker tells you her uterus has prolapsed due to her conditions of labour do we simply refer her complaint to a greater continuum in which objects, forces and energies take precedence? I argue not. However, is useful in understanding how an informal economy works. Amin & Thrift (2007) suggest that, whilst this draws attention to the ways in which 'objects-in-relation' regulate and shape economic spaces and connections, it also draws in other areas. Firstly, it allows attention to be paid to the relationship between social life, imaginaries, dreams and emotional practice. Secondly, it asks that we pay heed to ambiguous 'actants'²⁸² whose performances shape markets across economic and geographical space. Thirdly "...it requires a willingness to trace the long chains of connection that make and sustain circuits of provision and consumption" (p.158). Whilst this ethnography has addressed all three, this is not to say 'affect effects' are exclusive to the informal sector. It is not, I have argued, a result of spaces like Saharanpur being conceivable as pre-modern. Affective relations and informality of this sort are a part of economic relations everywhere (Amin & Thrift, 2007). With so much effort being put into controlling or influencing the emotions, dreams and desires of labour forces, with 'affective' spaces of production increasingly becoming the mantra of management gurus, with the Indian media, private sector and state all pushing the aspirational narrative of an 'enterprise culture' (Gooptu, 2013a), a consideration of affect in shaping work, life and migration in Saharanpur is critical to our understanding of an informal niche, a niche where the dreams and aspirations of superficially entrepreneurial workers are often the very dreams capitalism seeks to cultivate.

²⁸² Amin & Thrift borrow the term from narrative theory to indicate something more than a 'character' in that 'actants' are fundamental to the narrative structure as opposed to being mere performers within it.

We have seen how affect can play a part in bringing together moments of collectivity. I have not discussed such moments in terms of resistance out of a concern not to overstate the power of small acts (Brown, 1996; Bayat, 2004). As Herod (1997), points out, the power to act does not mean that one necessarily acts to resist the interests of markets or supply chains. Indeed, the interests or perceived interests of individuals and groups are as often colluding as they are resisting. Instead, I have articulated such actions in terms of negotiation. However, affect allows us to better understand how identities, although not always political in nature (Featherstone, 2008), are shaped by passions and desires that are increasingly becoming a part of the terrain in battles and negotiations between labour and capital or between different dreams and future possibilities. This is a somewhat treacherous terrain for labour's position. New Social Movement (NSM) literature, for example, not only emphasises the variety of multiple identities around which solidarities can form, but also the problems of sustaining passions beyond short-lived moments of collectivity (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Yet again we find ourselves tapping on the door of duality. It is duality that has been a constant companion in this ethnography of a North Indian Muslim craft community. Here I concur with Anna Tsing (2009/2012) in arguing that it is this double edged nature of economic relations which conceiving the scene in terms of niches helps us to unpack. As Tsing (2012) suggests "...global capitalism is divided into many niches. The niche structure of global capitalism is, in turn, both a structure of exploitation and a structure of possibility" (p.40).

'Look but don't touch': Going Outside (for the Last Time)

My time in the dormitories of Abu Dhabi was limited. Unlike in India I was unable to obtain permission to work. By day I was mostly alone as the workers headed out to the sites where they were fitting internal décor. They showed me photos of stylish apartments they had worked on. The rooms contained fittings and fixtures that would not be out of place in any fancy catalogue. The lobbies were grand, with tall ceilings and airy spaces. They also showed snaps from the public beach in Dubai. They were particularly keen on a photo of Abdul, one of those with whom we shared a room, in which the background scene contained a western woman in a bikini. Indeed, the photo

was staged to surreptitiously capture her image. The moment took me back to Hyderabad and a trip to a shopping mall with Sajid and Usman. They were regular visitors to the mall, which is attached to an IMAX cinema but, unlike the hordes of middle class Indian shoppers, the ways in which they were able to experience it was limited. We looked in the windows of the shops, rode the escalators and sat in McDonalds for a few minutes without ordering anything. As with the skyscrapers on which Gulfam and the other men worked, the foreign women they illicitly photographed, so much of 'modernity' could be seen but never really touched. Only I, within these groups of migrants, was able to cross the boundary. At times there is a tendency in academic literature, particularly that involving Muslims, to couch things in terms of a desire or resistance to 'modernity' (i.e.: Bennett, 2005). This often ignores how for many, of various faiths, it is not a question of choice but rather that economic and social predicament restricts them to the position of 'look but do not touch'. The informality of working life may act to create a variety of connections which cross continents and borders, it may provide access to certain resources and possibilities. However, whilst constraints can be 'peaked through' the limits are all too real.



Sajid looks on over the Shopping Mall in Hyderabad

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Appendix One

Glossary of Hindi & Urdu Words

<i>Apna kam</i>	Own Work
<i>Barelwi</i>	Islamic school based in the city of Bareilly (UP). In contrast to the Deoband school it favours the <i>sufi</i> tradition.
<i>Chacha</i>	Paternal Uncle
<i>Chai</i>	Sweet Milky Tea
<i>Chal-chalaan</i>	Broadly speaking refers to character or reputation but with strong meaning. Generally used by, or in reference to, women.
<i>Chilai</i>	Carving
<i>Deoband</i>	Islamic Madrassa in Deoband (close to Saharanpur). Part of the 'reformist' movement in Islam. While accepting elements of <i>Sufism</i> the school does not approve of the worship of saints or idolising of tombs. Followers are known as Deobandi and form by far the largest group in Saharanpur.
<i>Eid</i>	Religious festival marking the end of Ramadan and breaking of fast.
<i>Ghūmnāi</i>	Wondering/ Roaming/ Touring.
<i>Gora</i>	White/ Pale (often denoting beauty and also used to describe westerners).
<i>Haram</i>	Against Islamic Law/Practice
<i>Kara pani</i>	Salty water

<i>Kharch</i>	Expenses
<i>Quran Sharif</i>	Study of the Muslim Holy Book
<i>Kurta</i>	Pyjama Suit
<i>Maghrib</i>	4th prayer of the day. Carried out after sunset.
<i>Malding</i>	Decorative wooden strips similar to picture rails.
<i>Malik</i>	Owner/ Boss
<i>Mamu</i>	Maternal Uncle
<i>Masjid</i>	Mosque
<i>Murti</i>	Hindu idol
<i>Namaaz</i>	Prayer
<i>Purdah</i>	Literally 'curtain' but also used to refer to appropriate Islamic dress and concealment of women.
<i>Ramadan</i>	(Pronounced 'Ramazan') Islamic month of fasting from dawn to dusk (based on lunar cycle).
<i>Roza</i>	From <i>roz</i> meaning 'daily'. Refers to the process of daily fast.
<i>Sahoor</i>	Early morning meal consumed during Ramadan before fasting starts at sunrise.
<i>Sehan</i>	Walled courtyard common in Muslim homes.
<i>Shagrid</i>	Student/ Apprentice
<i>Tala</i>	Work station
<i>Thēkēdār</i>	Middleman/ Contractor
<i>Tikkai</i>	Fine carving of floral design

Topi

Literally 'hat' but here refers to the skullcap worn by Muslims.

Ustad

Teacher/ Master